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The Conduct of Life

by
Benedetto Croce

Authorised Translation by
Arthur Livingston



New York
Harcourt, Brace and Company

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1924 Author's Preface

THE essays printed in this volume as "The Conduct of Life" began appearing in *Critica* in 1915 as "Fragments of Ethics," a name by which they have since been generally known in Europe.

But they are not "Fragments," properly, if by that term we mean contributions toward the formation of a system of ethics. Long before they were written I had completed such a system in the third volume of my "Philosophy of the Spirit." They are independent and separate investigations, rather, of certain problems in our spiritual lives which needed to be analysed and reduced to the principles I had previously propounded.

The older treatises on ethics (even that of Kant) used to have their "casuistries" and their "theories of the virtues," where particular "cases of conscience" were studied in appendices to the systematic works themselves. The abstract and arbitrary character of such

Author's Preface

studies I have demonstrated in the course of other writings, showing the reasons why they were destined to vanish, as in fact they have vanished, from modern thought. But these efforts did respond to an actual demand: the need we all feel for having the fundamentals of ethics made specific and applied to the various situations that arise in life. These requirements, it seemed to me, might well be met by essays like those which I here present in specimen—in specimen merely—in the hope that others may be stimulated by them to pursue similar lines of research and meditation according to their own experiences and their own spiritual needs.

Never planned as a whole nor assembled in accord with any design, the essays were suggested to me by the most varied queues—a remark by some philosopher, a verse by some poet, some episode in public life, some personal problem of my own, some crisis of conscience in a friend. There is accordingly a certain lack of continuity among them, and here and there a repetition. But such defects are a reflection of the spontaneous origin and the free and independent character of the arti-

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cles themselves. In reprinting these in book-form I have thought it wiser not to make any abbreviations or modifications which would force an artificial unity upon them.

Translator's Note

IN translating these essays of Croce I have tried to grasp his thought and to restate it in a language as free as possible from technicalities—in my own language, that is. I am only too well aware of the risks and dangers of such a procedure. One of the beauties of Croce's writing is the geometrical precision of his terminology, which carries a brilliant transparency even into the most devious subtleties of the idealistic approach to the Universe. However, I have a feeling that the translator of Croce who is over-respectful of such dangers is likely to run into greater ones: the danger of leaving him unintelligible save to those few who are willing to prepare for reading him by a long and thorough study of all the philosophy of the nineteenth century; and the further danger of losing his clarity in the end by transferring his terms into an American language which has most of the same

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terms, but is coloured by a thought history different from the history of Croce's idealism.

Nevertheless, I have set a limit to my effort to depart from technicalities at the point where we approach the kernel of the Crocean system. I say "Spirit," where I might have said "Mind,"—in order to avoid the vagueness of the word "mind" in English. For with Croce the Spirit is a universal immanent "mind" of which the individual "mind" is only a phase.

Now it will be recalled that the essence of Croce's contribution to contemporary civilisation—a contribution that has re-formed the spiritual life of his own country and has not been without influence in other countries—is the critical method he has developed by rigidly distinguishing in the Spirit's activity three aspects or "spheres": the intuitional, the logical, the practical; æsthetics, logic, ethics; imagination, thought, will; image, concept, action. I take over this tripartite division in this language, hoping that the reader will recognise any of the terms that thus appear and understand them in the precise and strictly limited sense in which Croce thinks them.

But these essays relate especially to experi-

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ences and problems that arise in the “sphere of the practical,” in ethics and action, that is. And here we meet in Croce a number of terms that will be misunderstood if we interpret them in their common meanings in English: practical, economic, utilitarian. I transfer these words just as they are; resting content with the explanation that the word “practical” relates to the whole sphere of action, including its ethical bearings; that the word “economic” relates to action apart from ethical concerns, but with reference to the material or physical welfare or volition of the race at large; whereas “utilitarian” (in Croce it is almost equivalent to “selfish”) relates to action apart from ethics, and apart from society, but with reference to the material or physical welfare or volition of a specific individual or group of individuals.

Some of the fundamentals of Hegelian or Fichtian idealism I also utilise, but with a certain satisfaction, too, in view of their precision. I say “dialectic” for the process of creating reality by “transcending” contraries or “antitheses.” I have used the word “transcend” regularly as a translation of the Italian *su-*

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perare, though there is some objection to the term; since I also use “transcendent” in one of its usual philosophical meanings—for that which, in dualistic systems, is beyond the sphere of the human mind. The German “becoming” is rendered by Croce as “development” (*svolgimento*), for which, somewhat arbitrarily, I have elected to use the English word “progression.”

A. L.

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The Conduct of Life

I

Types of Failure

ANY one who has been called upon, in the course of a busy life, to induce people to work with him or at least to keep from hindering the task in hand, must have had daily occasion for observing—to his immense irritation, sorrow, or disgust—individuals who seem to suffer from a more or less complete paralysis of will.

Such experiences are so frequent in the ordinary executive's life that he ends by building up a museum of psychological types inside his mind, grouping his past tormentors according to their similarities or variations, and recognising new ones at a glance—marking them with appropriate labels in order to govern his attitude toward them accordingly.

Here, for instance, is the “visionary,” the “day-dreamer”—the individual who is always having big ideas. He impresses us with his glowing exposition of the first one; but we soon find there is nothing in it. He comes

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back with a second, and again we listen to him hopefully. Finally after repeated disappointments we set him down in our minds as a person who is never to be taken seriously.

This man is a man whose brain is fertile in plans, schemes, intentions; but when he has made those plans, elaborated those schemes, announced those intentions, talking of them as though they were imminent realities, he suddenly forgets all about them; or, indeed, if he does go so far as to attempt to carry them out, he shortly finds that they are not so glorious as he had thought, loses interest in them, throws them aside, to come back with another set of plans, schemes, and intentions, which he puts forward with the same results. If we, for our part, soon lose faith in this person, he never loses faith in himself; so over-bubbling, so irrepressible, so uncontrollable is this faculty he has for conceiving grand conceptions and dreaming great dreams.

Here again is another sort of person—the timid, over-cautious individual, the man who is never sure of himself, the man who never gets anything done; because, when he sets out to do a piece of work, he finds his mind ob-

Types of Failure

sessed with all the possible consequences of the steps he is about to take, tries to guard against them all; and, since such possibilities are infinite in number, shifts uneasily from fear to fear, till he ends by never starting.

Or still again we meet the “broken spirit,” the “discouraged man,” the person who seems bound to a past that will never return, who cannot adapt himself to the present, and is ever helpless and inactive before the problem of the moment.

One could think of numberless other “types”; but these three will be sufficient for our purposes. What is the matter with such people? The first, we might say, lacks “executive ability,” practical insight into things—in the language of the philosopher, concreteness; the second lacks courage, determination, initiative; the third lacks enthusiasm, buoyancy, healthy interest in life.

What I am going to say, however, is that they are all three deficient in the same thing: they are all deficient in will—in the will that means concreteness, means courage, means interest in life. And what, we may further ask, do they have to compensate for their defi-

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ciency? They have nothing—or to use philosophical terms again, they have Non-being itself; and that is the terrible thing about their anguish, as well as the reason for it.

To be sure, their minds are working vigorously: each and all they are painting mental pictures after the fashion of a poet, and reflecting, reasoning, thinking, after the fashion of a thinker. But if they have imagery aplenty—sequences, series, strings of images, that is, they never have the image which betokens what we call imagination; just as all their reflections, notions, ideas, never come to constitute what we call thought. They never feel that sense of satisfaction, that thrill of joy, which the poet or the thinker feels. For this they would need the very things they lack: the will to contemplate—the will of the artist; the will to know the truth—the will of the thinker. In some cases, indeed, individuals of this type escape perdition by saying secretly to themselves (or by acting as though they were saying to themselves) something to this effect: "What a sorry failure I am: useless, inefficient, afraid of life, hopeless, crushed, despondent!" And as they thus visualise themselves in their

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own minds, whether by self-analysis, by poetry, or by confession (the poetry may even be written, just as the confession may be made to some friend they trust), they experience a more or less enduring relief from their troubles; because, to the extent of the effort they make at least to understand themselves, they attain a certain degree of volition, a certain degree of spiritual activity. But if, on the other hand, they do not hit upon this remedy of self-analysis or self-contemplation, and if they fail to find expression in any kind of action, then the Nothing about them swallows them up: their restlessness of spirit leads straight to a negation of life—to perversion, madness, suicide—the death of the individual, in short.

The descriptions here outlined in just a few rapid touches are empirical, of course, and that is why, after the manner of the psychologists, I have called them “types”; but these types exemplify on a large scale (and with some distortion because the scale is large) the eternal process of willing as the latter reveals itself in what Hegel would call its antitheses. Bearing these types in mind, but coming down from abstractions to concrete reality, we are

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able to see that facts which here seemed to stand by themselves, separable and distinguishable from other facts, are nothing but a normal aspect of will, present in every act of volition which we perform: the aspect of fancifulness, of vague and rambling conception, of fear, hesitancy, inaction, futility—the passive phase, in other words.

This aspect of volition I have elsewhere named as the “phase of desire,” defining, “desire” as “will for the impossible,” or, what amounts to the same thing, as “unrealisable will.” “Desire” is something beyond contemplation or thought; but it is not yet volition; in fact it stands, in the volitional process, as “that which cannot be willed,” or as “that which is not to be willed.” It cannot revert and become mere contemplation or thought again, because the Spirit has already covered that ground and never retraces its steps; and it does not get to be will because it does not accept the conditions of volition: it wills without willing; a contradiction which does not exist as a state in itself, but represents rather the transition from thinking to action—is, in fact, that transition.

Types of Failure

In the moral sphere, this antithetical aspect of will, "desiring," is well known as the conflict between a utilitarian, and therefore selfish impulse, and the ethical imperative by which the selfish impulse is superseded. But the same aspect also reappears in the utilitarian sphere itself, as the passion for something harmful and destructive which yields to the will for one's own welfare or comfort.

Here an objection might be raised, which involves a question as to the legitimacy of speaking of a "utilitarian sphere" in the volitional process. If, we might say, the utilitarian phase of a volition is that of "pleasure," of impulse—impulse, that is, toward some specific thing—how can any conflict arise? If I want a thing, that impulse absorbs me entirely, and encounters no obstacles either in my moral scruples (which, as we are assuming for the case, have not been aroused), or in any competing impulse (since the latter, so far as it has been rejected by my choice, does not exist).

I must point out, however, that what the utilitarian impulse meets is precisely a multitude of competing desires, a scattering, centrifugal force which leads away from volition

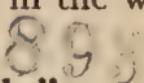
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back toward contemplation and reflection—whither we never arrive, since the contemplation we now attain is not true contemplation, nor the reflection true reflection. And this competition our impulse strives to overcome—a struggle which carries us into what I call the practical sphere of the Spirit's activity.

II

Sins of Thought

CAN one sin in one's thought?

In reality the phrase "sins of thought" is an absurdity. It parses well and its language is above reproach: no grammarian, no purist in diction, could possibly find any fault with it; but if we take it literally, replacing the words by the actual things for which they stand, it becomes apparent that we are confronted by an incoherency, a contradiction in terms, which shows that those who use the phrase have not soundly considered, analysed, understood the notion they are trying to convey. How, indeed, can one sin by "thinking"? How can "thought"—a health-giving bath in the waters of truth—ever be a "sin"? 

Nevertheless, "sins of thought" are real sins—big ones, little ones—but sins in any event; for they are manifestations, they are "acts," of the will; and this truth is so clearly

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realised by some people that the idea is often expressed by a more accurate phrase: "sins of desire."

But this change of wording does not get us very far, since the difficulties we found in "sins of thought" again confront us in forms even more perplexing if we speak of "sins of desire." What—rationally—can a "sin of desire" possibly be? "Desire" is itself "sin"; for desire is the opposite of will and is present in the realised will only as something repressed or transcended. And "sin," so far as sin is "desire," is rampant in all of us at every moment in our lives. The truly moral man, in the fulfilment of the moral act or in maintaining the state of grace he has gradually acquired, is always and at all times like the saint struggling with the Tempter, or like the Archangel who not without a battle subdues the dragon—or, if you prefer, like the Virgin who does indeed tread the serpent underfoot—her face serene and confident meanwhile—but who nevertheless has the monster under her body and in contact with her flesh! It has often been pointed out that if all the evil in the world were not in each of us in one way or another,

Sins of Thought

we would never understand evil; we could never re-create within ourselves (and such re-creation implies the possibility of our sinning) any sinful experience: we would never see the villainy of the villain in a novel or a melodrama: we would stand stupid and unmoved before the dialectic of life.

It is evident, however, that as compared with "sins of thought" the phrase "sins of desire" has at least the merit of referring the sins in question to the sphere of the practical. But in another sense it is quite as unsatisfactory: "sins of desire" are not "desire" itself in the large, but a particular group, a particular class, of "sins."

To illustrate: it may be a sin, a "sin of desire," for a wife sitting at the bedside of a brutal husband to reflect—without, however, omitting any helpful attention to her invalid—that the death of such a man would at least have its welcome compensations. Or here are two men keenly competing for the same position: one may take secret pleasure in some disaster—unprovoked by him, of course—which might overtake the other. And he too would be guilty of a "sin of desire." But such

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feelings—we might cite numerous other illustrations—are, strictly speaking, not “desires” (the dialectical phase of volition) but “acts.” For no positive manifestation of will within us, even if it be not translated into what are commonly and undiscriminatingly regarded as “actions”—external visible actions, that is—can remain without realisation: at the very least, every such feeling will have its internal consequences in certain definite attitudes of mind; and these, in turn, cannot fail to have their effects upon us. The “acts” above referred to, though they may seem to be harmless divagations of the fancy, cause us to do our duty coldly and mechanically; and a duty thus done is badly done—without enthusiasm, and therefore without the resourcefulness, without the vigour, without the efficiency, it would otherwise attain.

People are wrong, accordingly, when they say, as they sometimes say: “So long as I do my duty, let me think and feel as I please.” As a matter of fact, the yearning expressed in their dreams is a dereliction of their duty—so long as those dreams are nursed and fondled and not repressed and driven from the mind.

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Such repression and banishment strengthen and sharpen the will; whereas playing with the temptation dulls and weakens it. Hell, a wise man said, is paved with good intentions, and this truth is discovered in the end by those adulterers *in fieri*—to choose a very common example—who go looking for purely “spiritual” relations, for “communions of soul with soul”; and by all who indulge their weaknesses in various ways only to find retribution afterwards. The truly moral man will not overlook in himself or in others these so-called “sins of desire.”

There are cases, to be sure, when the caressing of certain fancies seems to express a really moral aspiration. I am thinking of a situation in Manzoni’s famous novel, *The Betrothed*. The hand of a criminal tyrant, Don Rodrigo, is lying heavy upon a whole county, but the Plague comes along and carries him off. Was that pestilence not a blessing? Did it not result in a “cleaning-up,” sweeping evil aside and making way for Don Rodrigo’s heir—an upright Christian gentleman—to succeed to the title of the licentious bandit and set about righting the wrong that the latter had done?

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What red-blooded man would not rejoice at the news of such a death? And if we may rejoice at a thing, may we not also long for it, hope for it, pray for it? But Manzoni is a subtle moralist. He is careful to make that shout of joy break from the lips of a character who is morally—and incorrigibly—inferior, from the lips of Don Abbondio, that amusing and very human priest!

The fact is that in such cases our pretence that we are hoping for something good is mere pretence: what we really desire is to be spared some annoyance, some irritation, some trouble, perplexity, or even effort—our wish, in other words, is at bottom a selfish wish. Don Abbondio was glad to have Don Rodrigo safely out of this world because he would then be free to shirk his own duty, as he often did, without untoward consequences. The person who thinks differently of the case falls into the error of distinguishing means from ends and cannot answer the man who logically argues, from the acceptance of the “sin of desire,” that murder, or any other crime, in a good cause, is justifiable.

Sins of Thought

It happens not infrequently that people find some painful situation simplified by an event wholly beyond the will or intention of themselves who profit by it. But in such cases, if their ethical sense is at all sharp and discriminating, they feel that the joy which tries to surge up in their minds is an evil joy, and they sternly repress it. They do not speak, as hypocrites do, of "punishments from heaven" which they like to see inflicted because they are the gainers by them; rather they force themselves into a state of mind whereby, were it in their power, they would avert or remedy the catastrophe of their enemy, giving up the advantage that Fortune has suddenly bestowed upon them, resigning themselves courageously to the troubles and annoyances they had formerly endured. They leave the joy to "small" people, people whose sense of righteousness is crude, blunt, obtuse—legalists who think in terms of form and in terms of words, indifferent to the substance that lies deeper. If a man is strong and upright in his heart, and really devoted to the work he is doing, he will go about his duties without regard to the

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things that happen beyond the sphere of his responsibility; for he knows that events are never good or evil in themselves, never favourable or unfavourable, but constitute simply new conditions to challenge his mastery in the accomplishment of new tasks.

III

Attachment to Things

THE Spirit, in its economic, or, if you prefer, its natural phase, creates life—our immediate or natural life; and the creation of life necessarily involves creating conditions essential to life, not as something distinct therefrom (as economists, in their formulas, distinguish ultimate values from the instruments which produce them) but as something intrinsic in it; since every act, every fulfilment, of life is a point of departure as well as a point of arrival—it is a condition of new life; and every series of acts is a condition, in the same way, for other series of acts. The sum of such series is our capital in life—our habits and capacities, our wealth, possessions, “property”—our “goods,” as they are often called, wherewith, as the philosophers of law say without fully understanding what they say, man asserts his right and his control over Nature.

In such possession life finds its joys and its

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consolations, along with many inevitable trials and struggles; but possession, born of instability, of progression, of development, of change, is a transitory thing, partaking of instability and itself in process of change. For the Spirit has created as its passing, ephemeral form, that group of vital habits and aptitudes which we call individuality—the individuality being co-extensive with that group of aptitudes; but at once it disindividualises the individuality, carrying the individual outside himself, outside the sphere of what he has attained, constraining him to regard all that he has been and is as a past which he must leave behind him to go forward to something else. Forced to abandon this or that acquisition, the individual suffers pain and anguish. Forced to abandon them all at the same time, he dies—which means that he yields his place to other individuals who will carry on the work the Spirit began in him.

Such is the law of the Spirit: to create life and then to go beyond the life it has created; and since this creation of life, this possession of goods and the happiness and joy they bring, may be called “love” (in the broadest and

Attachment to Things

most comprehensive sense of the term), while this transcendence of points attained, this breaking away from things acquired, this loss of goods possessed, may be called "pain," the rhythm of life becomes an alternation of love and pain, so inseparable one from the other that every seed of love we sow ripens to a harvest of sorrow which we shall some day garner.

Now there are people who rebel, or try at least to rebel, against this law of life. And their rebellion expresses itself in one of two opposite ways: either in a refusal to follow life in its changing, or in a refusal to accept and to love the fleeting blessings which life offers. To the first group belong romantic souls like Werther or Jacopo Ortis, people who die with the loss of the persons or things they love. They are our despairers, our lunatics, our suicides. To the second belong the ascetics of every school, from ancient Greek philosophers and the recluses of Christianity down to the many who, quite apart from all religion, strive to live without attachments to persons or to things for fear that these may bring them suffering. But the absurdity of both these ef-

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forts is amply witnessed by the utter failure which the first confess, and by the inconsistencies in which the second become involved: for in trying to avoid love for worldly things, they do love them in the end in spite of themselves—but tardily and unsuccessfully; and they are sooner or later brought to the position and to the destiny of rebels of the first kind.

Between these two extremes there is a middle ground which would seem to be more rational on the whole: to avoid direct opposition to life, without however yielding to it in such degree as to fall victim eventually to the caprices of Fortune. The ideal here would be a calm dispassionate aloofness from worldly things that was once supposed to mark the philosopher and the sage. Its outlines may be found in various thinkers, moralists, orators and poets of Græco-Roman antiquity who passed it on to their followers in the Renaissance—among these, greatest perhaps among these, Montaigne, who reverts to this ideal on numberless occasions and expounds it in not a few admirably animated pages: “Wives, children, and goods must be had, and especially health by him that can get it; but we

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are not so to set our hearts upon them that our happiness must have its dependence upon them; we must reserve a back shop wholly our own and entirely free, wherein to settle our true liberty, our principal solitude and retreat. And in this we must for the most part entertain ourselves with ourselves, and so privately that no exotic knowledge or communication shall be admitted there; there to laugh and to talk as if without wife, children, goods, train, or attendance, to the end that when it shall so fall out that we must lose any or all of these, it may be no new thing to be without them."

(I, 38.)

And yet, who can escape the feeling that there is something "small," something low and cowardly in such precepts? Who can lay down an essay of Montaigne or of one of his kind without feeling a little ashamed of himself and of humanity? Is it worth while living if we have to keep our fingers on our pulse, be sure the sheets are warm when we get into bed, be careful of every breath of fresh air lest it be the bearer of a fatal cold? Is it worth while loving with a book of hygiene in one hand, ever watchful that we love just

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enough but not too much, checking dangerous enthusiasms, dispensing with love altogether from time to time as an exercise in abstinence, constantly dreading lest too strong attachments bear their fruit in a too keen sense of loss at some future date?

There is good basis for this sense of shame we feel. In all such doctrines of the "sages" and "philosophers" worry as to the possibility of pain predominates over the nobly human concern to be active, useful, productive in this world; and the ethical ideals which these doctrines inspire or express are not free from strong traces of utilitarianism. To be sure, the sages teach that men should do their duty even unto death, but only because failure to do one's duty leaves an uneasy conscience not conducive to peace of mind. Their object is to attain that maximum of pleasure and that minimum of pain which are compatible with equanimity.

In reality, the true solution, the noble and the human solution of the problem arising from the inseparableness of love and pain, of life and death, must be an unqualified acceptance of love and of pain—of love as an instru-

Attachment to Things

ment and inspiration for our work in life, of pain as a necessary travail that marks our passage from the old to the new. The "sages" and the "philosophers" tried to soften the shock of loss by weakening the intensity of our affections for perishable things—a sentimental caution all the more futile since in practice it proves to be unavailing. The goal they were aiming at we can attain by loving with such high and noble purpose that we find in that very nobility the strength to resist loss when it comes to us and the will to rise above it to new enthusiasms. The great things in this world have not been done by "sages" or "philosophers," by those cautious souls who never put to sea lest they find it rough and stormy, but by people, as we say, with a "sporting instinct," by souls of energy and enthusiasm who leave the sheltered haven in the very teeth of the gale. The question, therefore, is not one of measuring the quantity of our love for worldly things, but of transforming the quality of such affections.

It is true that before we can arrive at this view of reality, we must have abandoned every notion of the individual as an entity by him-

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self—the so-called monadistic concept of personality, which is a selfish one at bottom and which shows its ultimate consequences in the “immortality” it promises us, so cheap and so vulgar as compared with a true and truly glorious immortality which transcends the individual. Over against the monadistic immortality, which I prefer to call pagan, stands the other, which is more characteristically Christian, if we understand Christianity at all deeply: immortality in God, that is. Once we have overcome the thought of individuality as something existing by itself, we are freed from all philosophical concern about life and death. We have to meet only the anguish of going beyond our anguish, which latter we accept if not with hearts, at least with minds, serene. We have left, in a word, only the practical problem of controlling, mastering, vanquishing, as need arises time after time, the practical form of monadism: our rebellious and our selfish individuality.

IV

Religion and Peace of Mind

IT is commonly averred that religion gives a fortitude and a peace of mind that no philosophy can provide; but for my part I cannot say that my observation of fact bears out any such contention. As I look about me or go back over my memories of people I have personally known, I do not find that the religious men I have met or dealt with (by “religious” I mean believing in some specific creed) have been any less agitated, any more self-contained than the non-believers of my acquaintance: joy and sorrow seem to have about the same effects in the one case as in the other. Nor does history offer me a very different picture. The saints, especially the great saints who were also great men, were as restless, as hesitant, as little sure of themselves, as men not recognised as saints—just as much wracked by doubt, just as much tormented by moral scruple and the sense of impurity.

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Of course it may be answered that because a man is a believer and a saint he is none the less a man and subject to human weakness and distress. Very well, let us leave the question of fact aside and ask instead for what reason religion should be expected to give a peace of mind which philosophy cannot afford.

A common answer is that religion offers the stable surety of faith. But this faith, this surety, this assurance, is in no sense the exclusive property of religion. Every thought, the moment it has been thought, becomes faith, surety, assurance: that is to say, it passes from flux to fixity, from thought to non-thought, from the dynamic to the stable, from the mobile to the static. Every system of thought has its corresponding faith. There is a materialistic faith and a positivistic faith, and so on for all kinds of isms; a faith, moreover, that is particularly conspicuous in the pupils and followers of the Founders, a faith that moveth mountains (oftentimes mountains of rubbish!).

But, it may now be answered, the faith of religion is unshakable, while the faiths of the

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philosophies and the schools lose their balance at every other moment.

This is not true. Philosophical faiths are as firm or, if you prefer, as shaky on their legs as the religions. For religious dogmas are also subject to discussion, and they evolve. If they hold their ground they are at least compelled to develop an apologetic—which would not be the case if no doubt in the matter of faith were possible.

This argument failing, perhaps another will fare better. Religions—some religions at any rate—posit the personality of a God and make possible some relation between the worshipper and this God—a relation that takes the form of prayer, of appeal for succour—our supreme refuge when, as Vico says, “all help from Nature faileth.” So this then would be the great consolation which philosophy can never give?

The trouble is that to appeal for succour is one thing and to get it is another. Prayer often remains unanswered; and we get the curious but not infrequent spectacle of the believer who, in such circumstances, comes to doubt the mercy and the justice of God, ceases to believe in Him and even reviles Him. But

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supposing the believer is a man of noble character and does not fall into this error? Supposing he becomes resigned to a Divine Will which sees farther than we can see? What, in this case, does he have that the non-religious man does not have—resignation, that is, acceptance of things as they are, faith in the rationality of the world and in some meaning for the world's history?

But there is one last argument. It is said that religion, in some of its forms at least, is a great consoler, because it promises that all our hurts will be healed, all our losses made good, all our wrongs righted in another life that will vanquish even Death.

To tell the truth, here again I doubt whether the fact bears out the statement. All men, whether believers or non-believers, seem to have about the same fear and about the same disregard for pain and death; and they all seem to find equal consolation (when they do find it) in the same way: from Time, that is—by taking up their work in life again.

But the assertion is false if we examine it in theory. For this thought of a future life

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either remains, as Leibnitz would have said, a “dumb” thought, a thought that is not really thought and is therefore without efficacy—in which case it does not console. Or else it comes to be a sort of vague expectation of a blessing not really hoped for, as Heine facetiously remarked of immortality: though he did not believe in it, he said, he could not repress a lurking hope that after our death God might be reserving a “pleasant surprise” for us! Or finally, it must be a true and real thought, in which case we must actually think it.

So thinking it, examining it in its real meaning and implications, following it to its distant consequences, we see that life beyond the grave cannot be the life we know on earth. We see that the Heavenly Beatitude of the religions dehumanises earthly affections and therefore excludes and precludes them; that in Heaven, as it is commonly pictured to us, there can be neither fathers, nor mothers, nor children, nor brothers and sisters, nor wives, nor lovers—but just spirits absorbed in worship of God and indifferent to all else. In a word,

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the other life that the religions hold out to us is the exact opposite of the life we have lost or are about to lose on earth.

And yet it is this earthly life we long for, it is the only one we long for. In exchange for the child we have lost, the child who used to play about our house with such roguish tricks and cunning ways, we do not want an angel; for in that angel we should find our child transfigured, unrecognisable. The woman we would see again is not a woman exalted in the glory of God, whose lips we may not kiss, but the very woman whose lovely form we embraced in life.

Selfish thoughts, indeed, thoughts which we must overcome, and overcome in the thought of an immortality purified of this alloy of selfishness which makes it incoherent and self-contradictory—an immortality such as philosophy holds out to us. For philosophy, as well as religion, bears witness to an immortality beyond our present lives and our present individualities. It demonstrates that every act of ours, the moment it is realised, is disjoined from us and lives an immortal life of its own; and since we are nothing else in real-

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ity than the series of our acts, we too are immortal, for to have lived once is to live forever.

And to me there seems to be much more consolation in this thought than in what religion promises; for it says exactly what religion says, but more clearly and with more assurance. And why should a consolation that is clear and demonstrable be less effective than one that is vague and lacking in proof?

V

Our Dead

WHAT shall we do when we lose the creatures who are dear to us, soul of our soul and flesh of our flesh?

“Forget!” answers Wisdom, if indeed with a variety of locutions aimed at softening the harsh advice. “Forget!” says Ethics in its turn. “Forward over the graves of the dead!” cried Goethe, and in chorus with him other great minds of the past.

We say that Time is the great healer; but too many good things, too many arduous achievements, are commonly credited to Time—a being after all that does not exist. No, our forgetting is not the work of Time. It is our own work. We will to forget, and we forget.

To all appearances the fact seems different. We commemorate our lost ones by gathering the reminders they have left behind, painting likenesses of them, writing biographies and

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eulogies, building tombs, appointing days for hallowing their memory. We do our utmost, I say. But is it really a case of "doing," and if it be, is it not a doing in vain? Not in vain, because it is not a "doing" but an "expressing." In all those forms and ceremonials we are simply giving voice to our own affections: we cry out to others but, before others, to ourselves to tell how great was our love for the dear one whom we shall see no longer.

And yet, all this utterance, all this expression in its multiple forms, is but a first step toward forgetfulness. In its first stage, grief is madness or something akin to madness. We surrender to impulses which, were they to endure, would carry us to actions like those of Joan the Mad. We would recall the irrevocable; we would cry out to one who cannot answer; we beg for the touch of a hand whose loving pressure we shall never feel again. We would see another glow in eyes which will never again smile upon us and which have veiled in sadness the smiles that once were there. And we feel remorse at remaining alive ourselves, as though our life somehow were a thing we had stolen. Yes, we would like to

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die with our dead. Who of us, alas, has not experienced such bitter thoughts in his bereavement? We are different from each other in the kind and quality of the work we do in life. But in love and in grief we are all alike. We all weep in the same way. And in the expression we give to our sorrow, in the various forms of commemoration and worship we accord our dead, we escape from our torment by making it objective, by putting it, as it were, outside ourselves.

So, in all these strivings of ours to keep the dead from really being so, we begin to encompass their real extinction within us. Nor is the result different if we set out to keep them alive in another way—by continuing the labours which they began but left unfinished. We do our best to maintain the institutions which they founded, to spread abroad the words they uttered, to bring their plans and their thoughts to fruition. But all this, after all, is a work of ours; and in process of developing it, we get farther and farther from what they did, going beyond it, actually changing it. If at one time we began to forget them by giving to our sorrow the relief

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that expression brings, we now forget them in a practical way by going on with their work.

So it is that in the life we live after they have gone we give a second and spiritual burial to the dear ones whose bodies we first covered with earth. A cruel thought!

And yet, as we think of it, we see that it is not cruel at all.

What we buried that first time was not they, but something that had ceased to be they—the earthly vesture they had thrown off. In the same way, what we bury this second time is not they, but our vain imaginings in regard to them.

What would they have asked of us, these dear ones who have gone? What would we ask of the dear ones who will live on after we have gone? Would we beset them like ill-omened spectres, tormenting them with our ever-absent presence? In our life-time we did all we could to spare them the slightest discomforts. Would we now perpetuate the most terrible and helpless anguish that human beings know?

Those who have died, we who shall one day die, wish only the welfare of those we love;

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and since that welfare is inseparable from the continuation of our best work, what we would have is that continuation, which is nothing else than a transformation. We are, in reality, nothing but what we do; and that is all of us that we would have immortal. Our specific individuality is an appearance labelled with a name—it is, in other words, a mere convention; it could persist only as Non-being persists, as a tremor in the void; whereas our affects and our works persist as Being persists, serenely, eternally, in the new reality which they occasion. What is this life of ours but “a hastening unto death,” death of our individuality, that is; and what is achievement save death in our work, which is at once detached from him who does it to become something outside him and beyond?

And is not this glory real glory, real survival—something far superior to the humming of many voices around empty names and vain appearances?

VI

Sex

PROCREATION lies at the base of all reality as the continuous production of the life we call physical or animal but which might more accurately be called individual or practical. And this is why it arouses the intensest desires, the most lurid imagery, in men's minds; and these desires and images, combining with other desires and images into objects of worship that are variously charming, attractive or perturbing, obsess our lives, particularly during our youthful years, and furnish an inexhaustible occasion to poetry and art.

When, moreover, the Spirit is really active in us, its particular form of activity at any given moment tends to engross our whole being; and so it is that among the conflicts that arise between the various forms of spiritual activity, the most violent, the most painful, the most distracting are those that rage between the sexual impulse and the other necessary forms of our activity—between sex and

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the moral life, between sex and artistic or mental effort, between sex and our other physical, utilitarian or practical functioning. In poetry and in art we have the whole range of the tragedy of passion from the "love invincible in battle" of Sophocles, to the loves of Francesca and Juliet, of Hermengarde and Emma Bovary. In our youth, I said; but also later on, in our grown manhood and even in the fulness of our years, as everybody knows and as history records in famous cases of white-haired suicides from hopeless love.

Vainly have men striven to bring peace into this tumultuous conflict by moralising physical passion, conserving its status as a natural function but overlaying it with much talk about union of souls, constancy, faithfulness, purity, aspiration. None of these things can truly and fully be given by a love that is merely physical; and it is no discredit to such love that this is so. Our senses know nothing of constancy. Our imaginations are not faithful. Souls, whatever appearances may be, are not made one in love; on the contrary, each soul in such circumstances is intensely concerned with itself—whence that disconcerting feeling

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of selfishness and hostility that suddenly emerges from the intensest raptures of sexual abandonment. Who of us, considered as a physical creature, is at one even with himself—let alone attaining perfect accord, perfect commingling, with another creature? Two souls can combine only in a third soul. To attain the direct and immediate consensus that is claimed for the erotic emotion is a pure and simple impossibility. There is indeed, in the history of sentiment and of poetry, a record of at least one attempt to unite love and morality, love and the “gentle heart,” woman and the ideal: that of the old Thirteenth Century school of the “sweet new style” from which Dante sprang. But in that case poets got no farther than symbol and allegory—demonstrating thereby that their so-called “union” was an intellectual proposition rather than an actual and concrete working of “souls,” and furnishing one more proof of the insuperable duality of love and morality the moment we try to combine them one with the other instead of subordinating one to the other and transforming one into the other.

Just as futile has been the recourse of elim-

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inating the conflict by striking at its roots—exalting and pretending to impose the “higher life,” the “perfect life,” ascetic virginity, ascetic castigation of the flesh. All such rules of life are founded on some transcendental notion, and they break down from their inner contradictions, leaving lunatics, perverts, and hypocrites behind as their characteristic product.

In these renunciations *propter regnum cælorum* there is oftentimes a certain grandeur—the grandeur possessed by lunacy in general. But even this saving grace is lacking in another and more perfectly stupid form of asceticism which it has been the fashion of late to describe as “rationalistic,” “positivistic” or “naturalistic” from various schools of philosophy which have successively put it forward. Here is attempted, by a process of “rationalisation”—“illuminism,” we sometimes say—a “scientific reduction” of love by guarding against so-called “exaggerations of sentiment” and eventually arriving at a so-called “solution” of the so-called “problem of sex.” The vulgar or perhaps ingenuous physicians and biologists who take a hand in this business remind

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me of certain grammarians and professors of rhetoric who come and tell you, as you stand enraptured before a line of poetry, that there is really no occasion for so much excitement; since the verse you have before you is just a string of sounds, syllables, pauses, and accents, for the manufacture of which you can find full directions in any treatise on metrics.

The royal road to the adjustment of the conflict is quite different from any of these, and is already indicated for us in the ethical institution of marriage. Marriage has well been called the “tomb of love.” For if parents saw in their children merely the fruit of sexual passion, would they dare lower their eyes upon the beings they have brought into the world? The tomb of love, indeed, but of savage, wholly physical, wholly natural love! The efficacy of marriage lies in this: that far from opposing native impulses of sex, which are essentials to the continuance of life, but rather favouring those same impulses by preventing their perversion or atrophy, they broaden and ennable them by associating them with a peculiar social creation of their own: the family. And for this reason it now ap-

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pears that marriage is not the only possible composition of the struggle; for what marriage does, and does so well, is simply to reinforce love with all the other manifestations of activity and creation—all the forms of moral, political, scientific, artistic productiveness, acting now as substitutes for sex, now as its assistants, all co-operating in works of love, and by that very fact keeping sex in its true perspective in the whole system of life, making it over meantime into something different from what it was when taken by itself as a natural physical impulse.

The sane rule of life should be not a frontal battle with native instincts, a battle which can end only in defeat, but to stimulate in our minds other spiritual interests which will automatically limit, and if need be repress, those instincts.

Sometimes on attaining the life of love that is a harmonious labour of creation—a life that is fully human, that is, we come to feel toward physical love a sense of ironical superiority which may amount to sheer disdain. But it is difficult to persist very long in this direction. The irony easily fails to ring true; and the

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disdain, however hard it tries, never quite succeeds in developing into a real contempt for mankind and for one's own individuality to which nothing human is foreign. The truth is that we have won our battle, quieted the conflict—without however destroying the causes of dissension. And fortunately so! For if we removed sex utterly from our lives, art, for example, which is replete with representations of love, would become indifferent and unintelligible to us (as happens in fact in certain dry, wooden, inelastic souls); and this indifference and incomprehension would react on our other faculties, diminishing the energy of our intelligence and the vigour of our will.

In opposition to what inhuman ascetics and scientists, so-called, contend, we must recognise the inevitableness of the battle and our need to fight it through. No peace is possible for us in this life save a peace that is ever in danger and ever ready to go to war, a peace ever watchful because ever threatened and assailed.

But this is nothing but the law of life. Or rather it is life itself.

VII

Forgiving and Forgetting

“PARDON” and “condemn” are correlative terms and apply primarily to the purely utilitarian field. We start an action to the damage of some individual; then we suspend it and take steps to obviate its consequences: we condemn, and we pardon. In times gone by a criminal was sometimes led to the gallows, and then, with the rope around his neck, he was pardoned, and sent home a free man. It is clear, in such cases, that the death sentence had one purpose in view, the pardon another and different one. The two actions were related but still distinct, each with its separate utilitarian outlook.

But in the moral sphere, the act of censuring and the act of forgiving are not two but one and the same. Every condemnation is a forgiveness in the sense that it is an invitation and an aid to redemption; and every pardon is, in the same way, a condemnation (pardon, in

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fact, has no other meaning). The two things go together and cannot be separated. They are as implicit in each other as negation is implicit in affirmation and vice versa.

The unity of these two phases of the one act people frequently violate in two opposite ways: by condemning without forgiving and by forgiving without condemning. There are some who condemn and abhor even beyond the grave—when, that is, neither censure nor forgiveness is any longer in point but only a dispassionate judgment on the past is called for. And this lays bare their inconsistency. For if, at first, their motive may have been a moral one, they have lost this motive in the time succeeding, clouding it probably with feelings of personal vengeance, descending at any rate from the ethical to the purely utilitarian sphere. Others never condemn—not from goodness of heart (true kindness is concern for another's best welfare), but to avoid discomfort, to keep out of trouble, to stay friends with everybody. If such may have had a generous impulse at the beginning, they too have eventually lost it to come down to the utilitarian plane. This process of censure

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and forgiveness, I may say in passing, appears with similar unilateral perversions, quite as much as in relations between different individuals, in the relations of an individual with himself. Some people indeed are over-indulgent toward themselves, and others are merciless self-persecutors. Above them, of course, is the man who condemns himself and then, without losing courage, mends his ways.

The censure that is forgiveness and the forgiveness that is censure are both embraced by the term “expiation,” which implies change of heart, an increasing and a strengthening of the moral fibre. When this has taken place, when we know that the wrong we have done we could never do again, when we think of that wrong as a past wholly detached from us, when we can ask ourselves with honest surprise how we were ever able to do such a thing—then we have truly expiated: we stand redeemed.

The manner and duration of expiation cannot be determined *a priori*; and this fact is taken into account in certain formulas of religious penance. Some sinners can hardly save themselves with a whole lifetime of rigorous

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discipline; others are redeemed by a single tear (but how hot a tear, and how cleansing, as it scalds the innermost soul!). Meantime some religious institutions, assuming a juridical attitude parallel with that of the State, determine the manners and the durations of penances—hence the “works” of expiation. All such systems, materialising, externalising the spiritual processes, take the sinner down to the utilitarian plane. Forgiveness becomes a definite concession accorded in exchange for a definite act performed to the advantage of the person wronged or of his representative. Against just this process of materialisation inside the Roman Church (indulgences) the ethical sense of the Reformation rebelled—the first great effort made in modern times to establish a deeper moral consciousness among men.

The wrong done, we commonly say, is cancelled with its expiation; but the phrase means nothing except that the wrong has been expiated. To pretend that the happening which occasioned the expiation has been actually abolished is of course absurd. Not even in the case of a material cancellation—the erasure of a document executed on a piece of paper—

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can something that has been done be made not done. What has been written has been written. We can render it invisible but not recall the writing of it.

In this case, it might be observed, it is possible to forgive, yes, but not to forget: the wrongs we have done or suffered will forever remain present in our minds.

This, certainly, would be true if by forgetting we were to mean the absolute obliteration of the memory of the wrong, which would imply obliterating the fact itself, removing one of the links from the chain of reality, one of the essential constituents of historical progression. But we can forget in a relative sense. What, after all, do we remember? The things that are worth remembering, things that constitute problems still unsolved! But when a process is complete, we dismiss it from our minds, to a very large extent at least, because we have no active interest in a past that has been closed. We think of the past again only when some one of its problems is reopened in connection with a new problem—when, for an instance in point, an individual

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falls into an error he has committed before and which he seemed to have expiated.

And who are those who never forget or who always forget? We all know them well: they are vengeful people, on the one hand, and tolerant, spineless or cold-blooded people on the other.

The former say they have forgiven but cannot forget. The fact is that they have never forgiven in full sincerity of heart. The latter say they both forgive and forget. In reality they have nothing to forget, for at no time can they be said to have remembered: they have never condemned wrongdoing but have overlooked it thoughtlessly or frivolously. We often encounter such apparent kindness and generosity; but we always feel suspicious of it. We dislike people who "are not conscious of any offence." True forgiveness must come from people who do know when they have been wronged.

VIII

On Telling the Truth

FALSEHOOD enjoys the particular abhorrence of moralists, and it is in very truth more offensive than other forms of evil, much as cowardice is less tolerable than brutality, calculating selfishness than frank and passionate rapacity. The reason is that it betrays weakness of will in addition to moral poverty.

But precisely because falsehood is among the most serious of moral errors, it is well to understand and define it clearly. For if we confuse it with other kinds of actions which are not censurable in themselves, the disgust we feel for it is likely to lose something of its force (I realise that conscience is a very delicate instrument, and for its part never makes mistakes which abstract thinkers find it so difficult to avoid).

A first mistake, of a theoretical nature, would be to define falsehood as failure to tell the truth. Thus defined, exceptions and res-

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ervations begin to pour in upon us. We are compelled to admit that in many cases the truth not only cannot but should not be told; and along this line we should eventually be driven to a conclusion, as distasteful to logic as to ethics itself, that in many cases lying is justifiable.

In case of physical struggle (for example, when we are resisting the assault of a highwayman, or the like), every one admits that there is no obligation to tell the truth. But there are also situations where no question of physical combat enters: the classic example is that of the invalid who must be deceived as to his condition lest depression reduce his vital resources. In such circumstances conscience tells us that we are not really lying, even that we are doing a duty, in not telling the truth.

On the other hand, we all know that in telling the truth under certain conditions we are committing a shocking offence against righteousness. There is the case of the malicious gossip, who can verify everything he says. Some people habitually torture us with their revelations of the "truth"; and our enemies stand ever watchful to discover not our

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imaginary but our real shortcomings to turn these to our harm. We may even gather up the gems of truth that fall from poisoned lips and use them for our own purposes: *salus ex inimicis*, runs the Latin phrase; and not infrequently we derive involuntary profit from people whom, nevertheless, we are thereafter careful to avoid.

When, then, should we tell the truth? And when should we not tell the truth? Just where does falsehood begin and end? Perhaps it would be better to preface these questions with another which is too often disregarded: what does it mean to tell the truth, to communicate the truth, that is, to others?

If we think carefully we see that once we have thought the truth we have already told it—to ourselves, that is, by virtue of the unity of thought and speech. But as for telling it aloud, as for communicating it to others—that is a serious matter, so serious that it is almost desperate. Truth is not a bundle that can be passed along from hand to hand: it is thought itself in the actuality of thinking. How communicate that actuality to others?

In fact, we never really communicate the

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truth. At best, when we address other people, we send out a series of stimuli which we hope will move them into a state of mind identical with ours, so that they will think the truth that we are thinking. We do not tell the truth even, let us say, in a prepared lecture before an audience, an academy, a class of students. We do not tell the truth because the most that we can do is to send out sounds, which will in their turn provoke consequences quite beyond and apart from anything that is going on in ourselves.

This puts a different face on the matter. The problem of communicating with others, of speaking to others, is no longer a problem of telling or not telling the truth, but of acting on others with a view to provoking certain actions in them. Among the many things required for this, truth-telling, which means truth-thinking, is one; but the overshadowing objective is that the life in people should be stimulated, changed, ennobled.

We realise this purpose by suggesting images which carry with them vitalising potentialities; and the generic form of this kind of action might well be named after its most con-

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spicuous manifestation: eloquence or oratory.

Oratory used to be defined by the ancient grammarians as “the art of moving the emotions”; and it has often been in bad repute with thinkers from the days of Plato down to the days of Kant, on the ground that it “did not tell the truth.” But on all such occasions, the fault has lain less with oratory than with a one-sided criticism which failed to perceive the deeper meaning of eloquence and its peculiar function in life.

It is good sense and good morals for a commander about to lead his soldiers into battle not to stress the possibility (or probability, or even certainty) of defeat that may exist in his mind, along with pictures of the dead and wounded, and of the birds and beasts that will almost surely be feasting on the corpses that will strew the battle-field; but to call attention to the glory of combat and the rewards of victory—among these, let us even grant, booty and plunder. Oratory follows a path directly opposite to that of art: art proceeds from life to imagery, oratory from imagery to life. When the images produced by art are used as instruments, we pass from art to

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oratory and disputes arise as to educative or corruptive art. Such distinctions may indeed justifiably be drawn, though it is not justifiable to continue using the term "art" for something that has ceased to be such and is now "oratory."

What oratory attempts on solemn or formal occasions, we are attempting at almost every moment in our lives in the words we address to the people about us. Most of what we say has an oratorical purpose, tending to dispose people toward this thing, or that thing, or toward ourselves, in the manner that seems most desirable to us. And every one of us is forever substituting unreality for reality in the things he utters, softening, toning down, modifying, whenever, that is, he fears that the real may hurt or irritate, or hopes that the unreal will soothe or inspire. I need not illustrate, for examples are easy to find. Ibsen, in particular, used to amuse himself collecting them, as he did in the "Wild Duck." A veritable thesaurus of them stands compiled in the "Praise of Folly" of Erasmus.

In view of this constant suasion that men are forever exercising on one another through

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suggestions that do not correspond with reality, not a few of us are brought to conclude that "life is falsehood," or less harshly that "life is illusion," or more sentimentally that "life is a dream." And we find correlative attitudes toward life. If life is falsehood, we may curse that falsehood, and look forward to the moment when we can wash ourselves of this dirty thing called life—even by a bath in the Styx or the Acheron! On the other hand, many charitable souls smile ironically at themselves and their fellows, and bow down before the goddess Illusion, benefactress and comforter of men.

As a matter of fact, neither falsehood nor illusion but simply Life, life spontaneous and assertive, intent on finding stimuli to live on, sustenance to perfect itself and grow! For years you thought you had a faithful Achates, a virtuous Penelope, at your side; and you nestled snugly in that confidence, rejoicing that here were friendly faces to greet you, props for you to lean on in days of trouble, sources of strength, security, comfort, encouragement, in your day's work. And you did work. You lived, and you were happy. But now you

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suddenly discover that your friend and your wife have not been just as you thought they were, just as they made you think they were. And the discovery brings a bitter disappointment.

But what, pray, can this present anguish take from the joy you had in the past, from the things you accomplished, from the life that was promised? You were living an illusion? But the illusion is an illusion only as you feel it to be such—now, at this moment, that is. In those days it was not illusion—it was not even truth: it was a feeling you had, a feeling of self-confidence and of strength. To the deceiver you may say with a philosophical smile: “Not thee I loved, but One who once had a home and who now has a sepulchre in my heart.” And that One is Life. After the dream, the awakening! Your hope is now dust, scattered on the earth! What can you do but dream a new dream, conceive another hope? And how conceive one? By a scientific investigation? What investigation could ever assure you that this or that person will be unfailingly trustworthy, that this or that situation will persist forever, that the roof

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above your head will never fall, that the ground on which you take your stand will never give way? No, you must do over again what you did before: accept the images that people give you of themselves in the words they speak, and go on living. You must say as we actually do say: "I must have faith!"

So now the essential difference between falsehood and suasion or oratory may be made clearer. To live we must have now truth, and now imagery, now historical fact, and now vital (that is oratorical) stimulation—and of the two needs the latter really is the more essential to us. A liar is not the man who supplies us with the stimuli we need, but the man who withholds the truth (historical truth) when we require it. The person who gives us the truth when the truth is harmful is something worse than a liar: he is a baneful enemy; for one word, one little word, of "truth" has been known to kill a man. Just so the person who gives us pleasant imagery out of time and place, when and where it brings not help but harm, is a flatterer and a sycophant. And when, finally, are truth (historical truth) and imagery not admissible?

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When, instead of promoting a moral good, they are used to promote a practical good to the advantage of the one who utters them, liar or truth-teller as he may be.

Truth, historical fact, and this imagery of consolation or inspiration are, to use a trite figure, a sort of drug that may be given to cure or to kill according to circumstance. It is as wrong to withhold the drug when it will cure as to administer it when it will kill.

IX

Predisposition to Evil

ARE there such things as “sick souls”—souls that are unsound, evil, perverse—as opposed to “souls” that are “healthy”? We must answer at the outset, No; for the Spirit is always healthy, and the concept of spiritual disease (of evil, of madness, of perversity) is included and subordinated in the concept of spiritual health.

Evil and error are not “forms of reality,” as people sometimes doggedly assert, but nothing more nor less than the transition from one form of reality to another, and from one form of the Spirit to another of its forms—the Spirit, in its effort to attain the higher coming to regard the lower as irrational, erroneous, evil. We have evidence of this in the fact that wrong-doing is always attended by a consciousness of doing wrong, by an effort, that is—it may be a faint one—to overcome evil; and this effort constitutes the true definition

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of "good." In accepting this point of view we are in no danger of slipping into a crass optimism, or worse still, into brute determinism; for here we are denying the reality of evil by making it implicit in the good, an aspect, therefore, a constituent, of the good, as eternal as the good itself; and the process we affirm is a process of liberation, of freedom.

Against this affirmation of the unreality of evil (equivalent to a negation of evil as a form of reality) it is unavailing to adduce in evidence the judgments whereby we are forever characterising actions of ourselves or others as "good" or "evil." Such judgments (judgments of values), considered in their two forms of approval or disapproval, are not true judgments (logical judgments), but expressions of emotion which accompany and, one might almost say, assist the effort we make in passing from evil to good, disentangling ourselves from the past to embrace the present, progressing over ourselves, or exhorting, inciting, encouraging others to progress over themselves.

Nevertheless, this negation of evil, logically unassailable though it be, seems to stand in

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open conflict with the observable facts of everyday life. There we are being constantly annoyed by evil actions and silly words, and we have literally to elbow our way through crowds of sinners and crowds of fools. If we look first at the world as it is and then at the philosopher who persists in denying the existence of evil, our lips have to curl with a smile of pity for that clown of a Doctor Pangloss!

To be sure, nothing is easier than to demolish a philosophy by caricature and satire: such is the resort of people, even when they are named Voltaire, who lack the keenness of vision to detect the weak spot in the inner logic of a system of thought. But Doctor Pangloss (or the philosophy of Leibnitz which he was made to impersonate) made a mistake too: the mistake of stopping at the generality and the abstraction. When we have denied evil as a form of reality and recognised it as an aspect of progression, or of passage, from one spiritual form to another, we must not overlook the precise limitations of this notion of progression—all the more since these limitations account for the apparent contradiction between theory and fact which arises when

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theory is made abstract and fact is elevated to theory, when, that is, we add to the mistake of Doctor Pangloss the mistake of his critic, Voltaire.

Progression (becoming, development), which is "history" really, creates for its own purposes the general manners in which human beings act: it creates "institutions"; and among these the ones actually so-called in the restricted circle of social or political life are relatively few in number and far less important than we think they are. Institutions are simply "specifications," or "specialisations," and not such specifications only as appear in differences of nationality, habits and customs, or character, but also and primarily (as the foundation of all others) such as develop according to the dialectic differentiations made by the mind itself. It is as though the Spirit were able to project its distinctions into space on a grand scale, making actual existences out of them.

Of this Schelling and Hegel were more or less aware in their much abused Philosophies of Nature and History—so true is it that all error has some foundation in fact! They thought of categories as actually existing and

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built existences up into categories, conceiving of nature as “petrified thought” and of history as a “sequence of categories,” each category, in its turn, growing to a climax and then degenerating. But Schelling and Hegel looked at the situation from a naturalistic or, what amounts to the same thing, from a metaphysical point of view, and they brought up, accordingly, in symbolism or mythology. They were too ready to fabricate schemes and systems in which pure imagination had a very large share.

In fact, there is no occasion for detaching the various forms of the Spirit from other forms and transmuting them from categories into things. The important point is to maintain, and rigorously maintain, the unity of the Spirit as wholly present in any one of its acts. At the same time, we must understand that if, in any given act, there were not such stress upon one particular form as to give that form predominance over all others, one act would be like every other act, and progression or change would not be possible. Furthermore, if more or less similar accentuations did not affect series of acts as well, we should never have that intertwining and interaction of the

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real which is called society and history. These differentiations of society and history (and of Nature also, which from this point of view is likewise society and history) are seen—if we bear the unity of the Spirit in mind—to be approximative and dynamic merely—they are matters of differing stress, not of differing quality; whereas Hegel and Schelling thought of them as absolute not as approximative, as static and not as dynamic—as metaphysical categories, in short. In this lay the error of these two great thinkers.

Our denial of categories in this sense does not, however, involve a repudiation of them when they are taken for what they genuinely are. We cannot refuse to recognise the obvious fact that there are, for instance, poetical minds and philosophical minds, men of originality and vision, and men of mere deftness or practical skill. No philosopher is a pure philosopher, no poet a pure poet, no selfish man wholly selfish, no moral man wholly moral. For (it scarcely need be said) all such men are men, first of all; and man, the Spirit as a whole, that is, is present in each of them, but present in such a manner, and under such

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conditions of emphasis, that through the predominance of one or another spiritual form, a given man may be called, after the manner of his acting, poet, philosopher, statesman, or saint. If, on the one hand, these specialisations or tendencies are referable to a dialectical differentiation of spiritual forms, on the other hand, these forms would never manifest themselves in history unless they created those particular instruments of their own which we have called, broadly speaking, "institutions."

An individual who is not distinguished by some special aptitude or who has several or all aptitudes in equal degree (the one interfering with the other) is usually taken lightly as a socially useless person or pitied as a mediocrity and an unfortunate. On the other hand, in men who perform one kind of service with distinction and are quite unable to perform any other—philosophers who can do nothing but think, poets who can do nothing but write, soldiers who are good only at fighting—we recognise the greatest social efficiency. We are not offended if the general is obtuse to the beauties of art, as was Lucius Mummius at the Fall of Corinth. What does it matter if

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the philosopher is inept as mayor of a village, or if the poet stands dumb before the first theorem of Euclid? To be sure, these are limitations in the individuals in question, limitations and therefore weaknesses, weaknesses and therefore "diseases." We are wont to smile (sometimes the smile gives way to disgust) at the impracticalness of the philosopher, the extravagance of the poet, the artistic absurdities uttered by men of the sword. But we are not inclined to build such people over. Indeed, if we could correct them, making up deficiencies at the expense of the specific excellences of each, we should never try to do so; for we know that reality does the correcting for us, tempering excesses and bringing virtues and faults into harmony with life (historico-social life) as a whole. In life one individual supplements the other and the irrational element in one is solved in the rationality of another. When we say that "all is right with the world," that everything is as it ought to be, that reality is rational, in other words, we should understand that the assurance holds only for reality at large, for the Spirit, that is, in its totality and concreteness. It does

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not apply to the individual who, when isolated from the whole, is only a fragment of reality. We may say the same of history in the large, but not of the historical episode taken apart from the whole progression of which it is a phase; for the full rationality of an historical incident becomes apparent only in our comprehension of the whole history of mankind.

But the point I was coming to over this devious route was this: just as the pure poet and the pure philosopher do not exist, as concrete entities, though both are abundant if we think of aptitudes, tendencies, stresses, "institutions," so the "sick soul" has no concrete existence, but is nevertheless frequently met with as regards disposition or character. Does not experience teach us that some people have a sort of vocation for wrong-doing, as others have for righteousness? Just as there are flights of genius that cannot be provoked by any kind of coercion, so there are defects that cannot be corrected by any discoverable discipline. We all know men who are selfish, calculating, untrustworthy, men deaf to all compassion, insensitive to any ideal, born delinquents, as we say, cynics toward all high

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attainment, mockers of all noble aspiration. And we all know men who are born weaklings, men without will power, men concerned exclusively with their own comfort and pleasure, ever ready to shirk a duty, ever disposed to satisfy a passion or a caprice. And the former, like the latter, are indifferent to good counsel however considerate and authoritative, refusing to seize the most exciting and most urgent opportunities to get away from themselves and be, as we say, human. Society tries to educate such people, but eventually abandons the futile task. As the Bible says: "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh"; and there is a common maxim to the effect that "you never can straighten a dog's hind legs." So we adopt various remedies for varying cases: we shut men up in prisons, guarding them like dangerous beasts; we ostracise them, leaving them alone in the world; or perhaps we simply advertise them, discrediting them, labelling them for what they are and are not, that others may know them and be on their guard accordingly.

But if individuals of this kind exist (individuals who have stopped, so to speak, on the

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lowest grade of will, where volition asserts itself as mere volition and is wholly directed to the selfish interest of the individual, who makes of it a weapon and a prop to challenge the world and escape its laws) they must exist as stresses, as specialisations of reality, as "institutions," just as much as the poet, the philosopher, or the statesman; and in their apparent lack of all social utility whatever, they must nevertheless fulfil a real social function.

That such is the case history amply testifies. To overcome certain obstacles in its path, to pass certain points in its onward march, the world has often relied upon the so-called dregs of humanity. But for these no Bastilles would have fallen, nor would any of the glorious revolutions of modern peoples have attained success. The armies of Europe have written luminous pages in the history of mankind, yet in times past armies were not recruited from respectable citizens but from the outcasts of the social system. From the same sources governments of all ages have drawn the high priests of their solemn ceremonies of justice—their headsmen and their hangmen, celebrated as sacred functionaries by Joseph de Maistre.

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And nowadays, if you please, where do we get the intriguers and the unscrupulous politicians without whom, it seems, States cannot transact their necessary business?

Or passing to the other class—individuals predisposed to idleness and pleasure, congenitally lacking in modesty, but richly endowed with gifts of gallantry, charm, allurement, and with special aptitudes for the arts of the Ar-midas and the Alcinas—we find that from an abundance rather than from a dearth of these (though not only from these, as is sometimes falsely pretended) society chooses the women—ladies or drabs as they may be—who provide an outlet for extramarital fancifulness and for the insurgent sensuality of youth. Not only is society compelled, as it hypocritically pleads, to tolerate such individuals; but when, as sometimes happens, the supply fails, it is constrained actually to seek them out and give them special favours—as we observe in the statutes of the old Republic of Venice and the speedy abandonment by the Popes in Rome of measures to repress them. But—not to linger on this unpleasant territory—where do we get the “low-brows” who on occasion fur-

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nish such welcome relief from the “high-brows”? Where do the Muratoris of all ages and places find the dunces they need as companions on their daily walks to entice their minds away from an unhygienic concentration on higher things?

Not that society holds its ground or that mankind progresses through the efficiency of vice and the inefficiency of virtue—as divers lovers of philosophical paradox have claimed in the past, and as certain poets—not the most intelligent among us—have sung in recent years. States, they say, come into being and heroes are born, from the release of the most vulgar passions: those same States, which, as Vico so nobly saw, would never have arisen save for a consciousness of the divine there is in man, and heroes who are heroes because they have resisted the onslaught of primitive passions and converted these into ethical riches!

But though the moral force is the one that guides and controls mankind, actual society, which implies differentiation and diverseness, normally presents, on the one hand, men who rule and, on the other hand, men who obey;

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on the one hand, men who create, and on the other hand, men who seem to be so much material for the former to work with and even to "use."

Surely our moral outlook gives us hope and even some assurance that as time goes on these sorry tools will be the exception rather than the rule in the operations of history; and especially that they will be ennobled after a fashion, as they have in fact been ennobled already, since already they seem to have become more intelligent, more rich of spirit, more humane, than they used to be. Our hopes for them, however, are much the same as our hopes for the abolition of wars. There will always be wars—though perhaps in forms that are somewhat disguised. So there will always be these inferior creatures whom society will look down upon and use. The purposes of the exploitation need not always be as direct as those illustrated above. By no means negligible is the rôle these unfortunates play in life by sustaining our abhorrence for baseness, treachery, or corrupt living, and therewith by deepening, strengthening, endearing to us our attachment to truth, rectitude, loyalty.

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alty, clean living. They stand before our eyes as anti-ideals; and as we shrink from them we cling more anxiously and fearfully to the exercise of virtue and to the worship of righteousness, to everything in a word that makes us different from them.

Nevertheless, from this idea of the necessity of evil—of the necessity of specialisation, that is, in the fields of volition and action no less than in the fields of theory, and consequently from the necessary existence of evil as an “institution”—the consciousness of human brotherhood springs, not so joyously perhaps, but not less nobly. These inferior creatures are inferior but they are also unfortunate. Condemned to suffering and punishment, or at least to deprivation of the good things of life, they are not wholly responsible for what they are. Rather the order of things in this world has made them thus. Even in their wretched estate, they work for us and help to make us what we are in the moments when we are at our best. Some of the responsibility for their lot devolves accordingly upon us who profit by it, upon us who are fashioned of their substance though destined to a different, but still

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correlative, function in life. That is why Christ (and in Him all humanity) wept tears of blood and was ready to expiate in His own person all the sins of the world. That is why each of us, no matter how abject the wickedness before us, passes through horror and loathing to compassion for those who do wrong; and our compassion flares up more brightly when we see, or think we see, on faces clouded with darkness a beam of that sunlight which we feel warming our own souls. That is why each of us, in the presence of a great crime, stands awestruck and in terror as at the bedside of an invalid who is dying of a disease that may some day attack us. And sadness steals into our hearts. For we are again reminded of the unseverable bonds of brotherhood that bind us to the criminal. In the disgust that evil actions arouse in us, we wish like the Manicheans of old that we could drive their authors into the outer darkness as children of the Devil, as outcasts foredoomed to Divine Wrath, as intruders foreign to ourselves and to the world we live in. But then our sense of fairness comes to the fore. Our consciousness of the truth shows them to us as

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our neighbours, cursed by us and for us, but therefore of our number. And we begin to understand the joy that reigns in heaven, as the gospel says, over the return of a lost sheep; for when it is vouchsafed us to witness the almost miraculous redemption of one of these unfortunates, we are moved to bow down before the omnipotence of the Spirit which has the power to break through the rigid walls of the specialisations, stresses, and institutions it has created, and assert once more its infinite freedom.

X

Nefarious Professions

THERE are “nefarious professions”; and every one is so familiar with their names that it is needless to list them here. Years ago, in mediæval towns, those who practised them were confined to particular districts and compelled to wear insignia prescribed by law to distinguish them from other citizens. Nowadays, the insignia have been discontinued, but the professions are still tolerated, and even, as happened in bygone days, stimulated and encouraged.

But not enough attention has been given to the nature of the professions designated by this particular phrase, that is to say by a substantive, with an adjective modifying the substantive. The word “professions” suggests, on the one hand, trades that may be practised, and not anti-social activities like brigandage or other associations for delinquency. On the other hand, the word “nefarious” condemns

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them, and not in terms of æsthetic disgust, but in terms of moral repugnance. The phrase in other words contains a manifest *contradictio in adiecto*: it says “yes” and “no” at the same time—the noun conceding a social need or a social good, and the adjective denying that need or that good.

The inconsistency cannot be explained away by interpreting the phrase as a *ne quid nimis* which concedes and limits all in one; for by such a formula condemnation is morally precluded. And in that case? In that case the contradiction cannot be reduced; and in fact it is not reduced unless we see that what is approved in the phrase is the “business” and not the “stock in trade,” and what is condemned is the “stock in trade” and not its form—the “business.”

There are evils which it is not at present possible to destroy, and to combat which would be a task more desperate than any of the enterprises of Don Quixote. Indeed certain programmes of repression are so absurd that those who attempt to put them into practice are at once buried in public ridicule. All that society can do in the meantime is to regulate the

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evils in question, choosing to give battle to them on some other ground in the hope of eliminating or attenuating them in a future more or less remote. A thing which cannot be destroyed must necessarily live; and it lives better, that is to say, it is less pernicious and therefore more useful, when it lives as a “business” or a “profession.” For this reason rulers of States have always pampered the “nefarious professions”—among others, prostitution, usury, and gambling. There is no inconsistency in this, for the “yes” and the “no” do not touch the same thing, the same point or aspect of the fact in question.

As “professions,” the activities here mentioned have a necessary relation to other professional activities, notably to the economic aspects of society, and bonds of mutual dependence between these professions and the others come into being. How could this be avoided? Only by taking away the form which these activities have assumed, the form of a “business”: and then we should be destroying not the evil, the “stock in trade,” but only the incidental benefits which accompany, restrain, and attenuate that evil.

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But the interdependence which thus necessarily arises provokes the criticism that when we thus legitimise social evils all society is contaminated by contact with them and all professions rendered "nefarious" by the economic relations they necessarily come to have with the truly "nefarious professions."

The criticism is more ingenious than profound, and it comes from minds distinguished for artistic impressionability rather than for logical thought. The honest financier, when he cashes the profits of his bank, does not know and does not care whether the money deposited with him may not be in greater or lesser part and more or less directly or indirectly derived from speculations on vice and poverty. *Non olet* is Bernard Shaw's sarcastic comment on such cases. And money, in fact, has no smell. The Roman Emperor who first used that phrase spoke the purest truth. It is wholly absurd to accuse honest men of hypocrisy and exploitation of evil under these conditions. They might as well be held responsible for the creation of the world and for all the sins (if sins they be) that have sprung from that. Many beneficent endowments have been created by

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legacies from usurers who were afraid of Hell. What of it? What they bequeathed was not a concentrated extract, a refined by-product, of wrong-doing—only a fantastic mind could think it was; but a concentration of economic power, innocent as such and in the case in point moreover devoted to a worthy purpose. For such endowments lead through education to the ultimate attenuation or destruction of the vice that was once the stock in trade of the profession. And it was the profession and not its underlying vice that produced the accumulation of economic power.

XI

Gratitude and Merit

THE moralists of olden times used to argue whether gratitude was or was not to be numbered among the duties and the virtues. Now such discussions are at an end; not because the question has been settled, but because interest in ethical problems has diminished with the decline of the religious spirit and has not been able to find as yet an adequate practical substitute in the cultivation of philosophy. This weakening may be perceived especially in the forms of culture most remote from their religious origins, the intellectual cultures, namely. There we find no trace of sensitiveness to those delicate "moral scruples" which are to ethics what refinement of taste is to art and to the philosophy of art.

However, looking through the old treatises on morals and following the classifications and the arguments that are there debated as to *gratias agere*, *gratias habere*, and *gratias re-*

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ferre, people, it seems to me, ought readily to agree that the concept of "gratitude" is a concept not of ethics but of law.

To support this conclusion, or at least to suggest it, the very definition of "gratitude" should suffice—if gratitude be the duty devolving upon an individual to repay with benefit the benefit received from another individual. Ethically speaking, nothing good is ever done to the advantage of an individual as an individual, but only to the advantage of the universal order to which benefactor and recipient are alike subject; and the obligations arising from a favour received, like those accompanying a favour done, are obligations toward that order and not toward any person.

But in the juridical field we immediately encounter the particular type of relationship in which the concept of gratitude has a natural place: wherever there is an exchange of economic values, wherever there is a contract expressed or implied, wherever there is a case of *do ut des*. From such presuppositions come the bonds between patron and client, between overlord and vassal, between captain and soldier, and so on down to the loyalties of secret

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societies, robber bands, and criminal conspiracies in general. The notion of gratitude to the person is so clearly established in law that the modern Italian civil code, of Napoleonic and Roman origins, permits the revocation of a gift if the recipient prove ungrateful.

Now all this is foreign to the ethical field. The well-balanced man feels an actual repugnance, not only for demanding gratitude but even for desiring it. The return of a favour he interprets as something not really his due, and to accept it seems to imply a subservience of man to man which he is loath to recognise. Nor is this all. The true gentleman feels a certain indelicacy in the attempt to balance one's debt to a benefactor. As an old French moralist pointed out, haste to repay a favour received is a sort of ungratefulness in itself. It suggests failure to appreciate the subtler values of a courtesy, and tends to interpret the latter as a mere affair of give and take, lowering it therefore to the economic or legal plane. Indeed it is ethically necessary at times to meet a favour with apparent ingratitude, announcing, as an Austrian official once did in connection with help his country had received

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from Russia, that we will “dazzle the world with the magnitude of our ungratefulness.” There are cases, to be sure, where one may legitimately level the reproach of ingratitude against one who has received a kindness; but in such cases the sinner’s behaviour must be unjust and immoral in itself, betraying vulgarity and meanness of disposition and showing that the kindness done has been either vain or harmful, that, in a word, it has not served the universal order. If a person would repay a benefactor morally and without offence, he can only show himself worthy of the benefactor’s moral approval—and the approval will fall not upon him, the individual, but upon the moral consciousness which is greater than himself. In an extreme and tragic case this might require his actually taking up arms against his benefactor.

But to recognise the juridical character of the obligation to be grateful is not to deprive the concept of value either in its own peculiar field or in respect of morality. The economic life and the moral life do not stand toward each other as co-ordinate independent spheres: there is perpetual and continuous intercourse

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between them. The economic or juridical virtues are presuppositions of the moral virtues and are the first steps towards attaining these. This fact explains the importance we attach to gratitude, loyalty, fidelity, though these arise and persist from considerations of utility. Gratitude represents the surrender of a narrow and transitory good in favour of a higher and more permanent one. It is at least a transgression of the immediate impulse by an exercise of will; and strength of will is a prerequisite of moral will. The thief who cannot be a loyal thief will not make an honest man even if he leaves off stealing. A man who cannot live up to his juridical obligations is not prepared to meet his moral obligations. Being an economic virtue, gratitude appears under its moral aspect as a non-absolute awaiting further development. But it is far from being a negligible thing: for the man who does his duty for selfish motives is still in advance of the man who cannot be consistent even in his selfishness.

Likewise juridical rather than ethical by nature is the concept of "merit," which differs from the notion of "gratitude" in that it re-

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lates to a service performed over and above legal obligation and to the advantage not so much of an individual as of a more or less extensive group. Society indeed has invented various systems of recognition and recompense to promote the creation of "merits" by an appeal to utilitarian impulses—and not infrequently to petty vanity or farsighted self-seeking. There are people whom we can never keep usefully active unless we dangle before their eyes some such glittering object as a cross of knighthood. And a canny social organism will therefore establish official orders and acknowledgments of "merit." These will always provoke the mirth of the moralist, but they will have the wholesome respect of the practical man who cannot fail to see the tangible fruits they bear, the profits they earn, the bacon they bring home.

But a system of ethics cannot pretend to have freed itself entirely of utilitarian ideas so long as it continues to define virtuous actions as "meritorious" in contradistinction to "duties" considered as obligatory; for the concept of "merit" will always preserve a trace at least of a credit which the individual takes

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to himself as an individual apart from the universal order—a trace of selfish interest, that is. The truth is that in acting ethically, even, let us say, in performing an act that attains the supreme heights of heroism, we are doing what we can do and what, inasmuch as we can, we ought to do. There is, consequently, no “merit” in our action. Hence the modesty of truly noble men, their fear and trembling as they confront the crisis, the little time they spend in self-congratulation over the feat accomplished; because if what they did was well done, by that very fact it was such that the individual was swallowed up and lost in it, obeying its sheer necessity.

This consideration, however, does not validate a judgment only too often put forward by the lazy and the vicious. There is no credit, they say, in doing good or great things since those who do them follow their own nature, interest, or pleasure. Others do differently only because they have different natures, different interests, different pleasures, and therefore submit to a different compulsion.

The conclusion is beside the point; for though it seems to state a self-evident and in-

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contestable fact, those who draw it do not observe, or at least pretend not to observe, that it really has no bearing on the denial of "merit" as a legitimate ethical concept which I have just made. What this excuse denies is the difference between pleasure and duty, between action to the advantage of an individual and superindividual action. Its denial of "merit" is a mere pretext, a mere cloak, for a denial of morality; and an attempt to utilise the determinism of a formula—*trahit sua quemque voluptas*—to identify morality with convenience or caprice. It is a salve for guilty consciences in people who would enjoy the peace of mind that virtue brings with full liberty meantime to indulge their whims and vices.

XII

“Heart” and “Reason”

THE contrast between “heart” and “reason” is one of the most frequent commonplaces of everyday life; and even the careful thinker may take it over, though the terms in which it is expressed are clearly erroneous or at least such as easily lead to error. For if by “reason” we mean thought (which can only be “truth”) and by “heart,” sentiment or will, no real opposition can exist. A conflict between a prerequisite and the thing it determines, between the light of truth and the warmth, the fever of action which that light engenders, is unthinkable. But to go further into this criticism might seem to be verbal hair-splitting: in the present case “reason” can mean nothing but “rational will” or “will for the good,” and “heart,” likewise, volition that tends toward the good. So the conflict, if conflict there be, can arise only between two wills, two goods, two “hearts.”

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For that matter, even in the terms of the common phrase itself, the conflict seems to be announced only to be adjusted; for the prestige and the demands of what is included in the word “reason” are so majestic that we cannot concede victory to anything else. The “reason” in question is a larger and deeper “heart,” which includes and subordinates the lesser and less noble heart; and any attempt on the part of the lesser to assert itself against the greater is condemned by our conscience either as we are about to permit the attempt, or shortly after we have permitted it. Our minds tell us that things, in a given situation, stand so and so, and reason (which, in this case, is the will for the true) keeps them that way in our consciences; but the situation is too painful to our “hearts” (to our contingent needs of the moment); so we try to obscure that truth with all the illusions which the little and lower heart suggests to the fancy, and which the bigger and higher heart refutes by thought.

Here is a child to whom you are devoted. A long series of observations and experiments has convinced you that his tendencies are such

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that he must be subjected to severe discipline, brought face to face with privations, denied demonstrations of your affection, committed, let us even say, to a correctional institution. But your love as a parent quibbles with these obvious convictions; you grasp at the slightest wisp of evidence that seems to prove them wrong; you build up a wholly imaginary situation, soothing to your "heart" but in conflict with your "reason." All along, meantime, you feel restless, uneasy, remorseful. You realise that a lower emotion is causing you to close your eyes to a truth which a higher concept of your child's welfare bids you sternly look in the face. In harbouring an inclination to let the lower impulse triumph over the higher conviction, even though that lower impulse, taken by itself or in circumstances different from those before you, be a thoroughly noble one, you yield to your "heart," which is your individual heart and impersonates your tenderer yearnings and, after all, your selfishness. It is not even necessary for you to refuse to see the unwelcome truth in order to act against the loftier resolution which that truth has in-

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spired in you. Giambattista Vico, besides being a great philosopher, was also a devoted father. Having brought himself to the unwelcome conclusion that his incorrigible son should be punished, he summoned the police to take the boy to prison. But then, carried away by his “heart,” he warned the boy of the danger and urged him to make his escape. In such cases as this, we more openly give the victory to the “little heart” at the expense of the “big heart,” to the individual at the expense of society and humanity.

From what has just been said it is easy to understand why people who sin by letting “heart” dictate to “reason” are viewed with an indulgence mixed with sympathy, or even with actual admiration and respect. The “heart” they have shown, considered by itself, or as a general tendency of character, is a good heart, by no means selfish intrinsically. Only incidentally has it become selfish by reason of the conflict with the other “heart.” And the selfishness it manifests belongs to that less repugnant kind which we specify as “weakness.” In reproving such people, we reflect that we,

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their self-appointed judges, would probably not have done differently in like circumstances; and on that account, forgiveness bursts all the more hot and abundant from our souls. Besides, their short-coming bears witness to valuable human qualities, which under different conditions have produced and will produce works that are beautiful and good.

More interesting to analyse is the feeling that arises, in the opposite case, toward people who have resisted the appeal of "heart" and adhere to "reason." Very rarely is it one of admiration, though when we do come to admire, our admiration reaches the exalted form which we designate as veneration. More often we feel something between coldness and diffidence. And why should this be? Why should reason fail to engage our sympathies? Why do we warm toward Giambattista Vico, bent on saving his scapegrace son, while we stand unmoved before the stern and uncompromising Emmanuel Kant, who, at least as we are made to think of him, was a man in full and coherent accord with himself in his theories of duty and in his observance of duty?

Kant, however, was a discerning moralist and

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pointed to the solution of this puzzle in his distinction between actions performed out of a sense of obligation and actions springing from a deeper moral consciousness. The higher will for the good, “reason,” that is, may easily develop into a system of abstract maxims and rules for right living, and so become more or less mechanical in a sort of second nature to a man. In this case the man is quite sure of himself and goes his own way unswervingly, literally compelling society to esteem him as just and perhaps so esteeming himself. But a certain amount of aversion is suffused through this public approval, corresponding to a vague uneasiness in the mind of the man himself, a besetting fear lest that inflexible morality of his may have been touched with a trace of selfishness, lest the “reason” have become “ratio” in the less agreeable of this word’s two meanings. “Ratio,” on the one hand, denotes logical and ethical consistency; but it also denotes mathematical or arithmetical coherency—calculation. Forcellini, in fact, thus defines it: *ratio duo præsertim significat, nempe facultatem animæ qua unum ab alio deducimus ac disserimus; et actum supputandi sive calculum.*

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Now if reason is really to vanquish the heart, it must itself be, as we said at the beginning, a “bigger” heart and therefore capable of experiencing the very feelings it is forced to punish or restrain. These it must integrate and synthesise in a new feeling, a new act of will, and the process is not something cold and mechanical but partakes of all the warmth and turbulence of life. Against a rationalising and abstract habit of virtue which often misses the mark, the “heart” rises in protest; for the heart, as if by natural endowment, has a living experience of humanity and of the good, whereas the corresponding experience of habit is a dead and artificial thing fitted together piece by piece with the sutures offensively visible to the perception. There are people who observe in themselves a lack of any great amount of spontaneous generosity; and they suffer keenly from this want. But at the same time, we cannot always rely on people of so-called generous instincts; for these easily go astray, following caprice and momentary whims. Over men of “reason,” of “cold reason,” which is the same as decorous selfishness, moral preference must be given to men of “heart,” however imperfect

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these may be. But to men of “heart” we must prefer men of “big hearts.” The situation is quite analogous to that prevailing in the sphere of æsthetics. To the artist whose forms are cold and correct we prefer the artist who is undisciplined but rich in sentiment; for if the latter has not attained true art, he at least has the living germ thereof, while the former has only its dead exteriors. But greater than both of these is the artistic genius who gives perfect form to the feeling within him, so that nothing in his work remains unexpressed, nothing is left inanimate.

“Cold reason,” to add one concluding remark, is originally responsible for the apparent conflict between theory and practice. For in “reason,” in the sense we are here considering, the will is still weak if it has begun to function at all, and is hardly to be distinguished from the abstract maxims and principles of conduct present to the intellect. At any rate it has as yet left the heart (the passions) inert, or virtually so. The light has not yet been transformed into heat; and in connection with the difficult process of that transformation, a conflict does arise, but wholly within the will it-

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self. In this conflict it sometimes happens that the lower and stronger impulse derides and scorns the higher and weaker; so that the latter is rendered powerless, or even completely routed and subdued.

XIII

Compassion and Justice

A NUMBER of the older philosophers of morality used to regard the concepts of "compassion" and "justice" as distinct from each other, and sometimes they were even taken as antithetical—and thus one of the numerous occasions for the so-called "conflicts of duties." And in very fact, the moment the ethical life is not carried back to its fundamental principle and taken as a unit, the moment we posit a number of different ethical principles, a "conflict of duties" must inevitably arise as a logical consequence. This is not wholly without compensation, however; for the thinker who is given the desperate task of solving one of these insoluble problems is sooner or later led to doubt the claims of the various competing principles, or rather to question their assumed multiplicity.

To bridge the apparent gap between "compassion" and "justice" it is helpful to observe

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that "compassion" is not the sympathetic attitude of mind for which it is sometimes mistaken. "Sympathy," interpreted in its deeper and stricter meaning, is seen to be only a necessary aspect of understanding, of intelligence; for unless we succeed in making a state of mind, an individual psychology, a spiritual development, our own—unless we have succeeded in reliving it, in making ourselves a part of it, it is impossible really to understand it; we have no experience of it, and without experience, there can be no intelligence, no understanding. Certainly we have no intention of denying the importance of intelligence for the moral life—an importance so great that it has given rise to the apothegm that "goodness is intelligence." Rather we would amend this saying in the sense that intelligence, in its turn, is a necessary phase of goodness: without intelligence, goodness cannot be. The much praised kindness of women, for example, presupposes knowledge of many things which men ordinarily seem not to understand or to which they do not give enough attention.

But compassion, in its ethical bearings, is not just sympathy, the prerequisite of intelli-

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gence; it is something more. It is an active or practical attitude of mind, a will to act in a certain direction; and, since will and action are really one and the same, compassion is always an action, and only in real action does it demonstrate its real existence or at least its depth and sincerity.

This explains an illusion into which we often fall. There are certain sympathetic, discerning, delicately sensitive minds who seem to feel and almost to divine what other people are thinking and feeling, and to speak of others with amazing comprehension. And we make the mistake of concluding that they are compassionate souls. But facts then come to remind us that such people, who might well be called "artists," are often as slow in acting as they were quick to sympathise; and that the extent of their emotion at some situation presented to them in imaginary form by poetry is balanced by their indifference to similar situations in real life, to remedy which would require some effort on their part, some sacrifice of comfort or convenience. People, on the other hand, who have true compassion, active compassion, are inclined to shrink from purely

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sentimental thrills; and instead of wasting their pity on unfortunates far removed from them in time and space, turn their attention to their neighbours near at hand, and provide for them.

Now if compassion, when it really amounts to something, is action, what sort of an action can it be? Is it ever an action apart from justice, or contrary to justice?

Even on this point everyday language speaks of true compassion and false compassion, of people who deserve compassion and people who do not. And the interesting thing about these dicta of common sense is that the two concepts which are separated by the thinkers are popularly identified as one through a more or less conscious subordination of compassion to justice. Compassion without regard to justice is in fact a common peculiarity of people who easily throw their own duties overboard: indulgent toward themselves, they are inclined to be equally irresponsible toward others in whom they see reflections of themselves. We are wont to criticise such sentimentality in women, because women, as a rule, are deficient in the sense of justice; so they frequently sin

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from misplaced, or—as Kant would have put it—from “pathonomical” compassion.

On the other hand, it is utterly impossible to act justly, unless we understand men—their feelings, that is, and the inner essence of what they do; and unless the compassion this understanding brings gives rise to an impulse which is an impulse toward the good, a will to cure or alleviate suffering by winning victory for the good. True justice is nothing but compassion.

XIV

Toil and Pain

Not a few economists have undertaken to investigate the relation of work to pain, and they have concluded, often on grounds of etymology and comparative linguistics, that work is essentially painful, essentially an affliction.

But this time we need have no hesitation in asserting that the exact opposite is the case. Work is essentially a joy—the joy of living; or rather, living, the joy of living, is nothing else than work. If we ever stop working we are bored, we are smothered, we die. Even children “work,” for their games to their minds, and therefore in reality, are “work.” Even people who make a profession of amusing themselves work, and work hard in their way; as any one may verify by watching them busily and diligently attentive to things which the rest of us call trifles.

Now if this be true, if labour is a joy and

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not an affliction, how in the world did it occur to any one to consider it an evil? Evidently—the answer suggests itself—evidently because there is such a thing as painful work—work that distresses us. And how can work distress us? What can such work be?

Painful work is the work we fail to make our own; the work that does not harmonise with our inclinations and aspirations, does not become an inclination and an aspiration with us, does not engage our whole being. Such work tears us, more or less violently but always with violence, from *our* work, the work that is dear to us. And it pains, it distresses, quite as much by what it deprives us of as by what it imposes upon us.

Examples are within reach all around us: those little “jobs” that wait for us every hour and day of our lives—the attention we must give to domestic details, let us say, or the task of patiently answering all the questions that people ask us, interrupting our own work, meantime; or the big “jobs” and the longer ones, which oblige us, since we have to make a living, to fill some position we should never in the world have chosen, or which drag us

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away from our comfortable homes at sunrise to spend the day in factory or office.

Can the world ever be rid of this work that is pain? Entirely, radically, in its "idea," its universality, no, as may be seen from the fact that in the course of labours we have begun with joy, moments of difficulty, annoyance, pain, inevitably come, moments when we have to urge ourselves to carry on till the enthusiasm returns again. Poets know such moments well, as do all artists. They would never get very far if they always waited for their "inspiration," as people call it, to catch their sails in its gladsome winds and send them merrily forward.

Inspiration is not peculiar to the artist. It comes to all of us, whatever our walk in life. And it is not a substitute for will, but depends on will. It is a sort of grace from on high that descends upon those who allure it, inviting it by daily effort, preparing themselves to welcome it, and sustaining it when it has come by new efforts. Nor, beyond the sphere of the work we do for the joy of working, can we suppress the questions which the march of life puts to the individual and which he is obliged

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to answer. Rebellion against this necessity would be not only vain but harmful (for the very idea of necessity presupposes rationality).

And harmful to us as individuals! Who can say that a question put to us by the larger world is not for our good, as it is certainly good for society and for humanity? People who evade such questions, who shirk their duties because of the annoyance those duties bring, miss many grand occasions for growing bigger and better. In their anxiety to preserve their own capricious freedom, they gradually lose their power to utilise and enjoy their freedom. They decay inside, and there comes a day when they find themselves unable to do even the work that was once their love and their fondest ambition.

We cannot escape from this law of life. A world offering nothing but congenial and inspiring tasks, tasks without constraints and without disagreeable or painful aspects, is a utopia such as anarchists fancy, or other dreamers equally confused in their minds or equally innocent of practical wisdom. We cannot altogether abolish the work that is pain.

But if we cannot abolish it, we are not for

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that reason excused from doing our best to reduce its quantity to the advantage of congenial labour, which, because it is congenial, is all the more productive. And in fact we do so reduce it. Each of us tries to bring his life into harmony with his own natural tendencies, eliminating, as far as he can, occasions and causes for interrupting congenial labour with work that is "hard," and making the latter less hard and more endurable by a variety of attractions and hopes of reward. We all strive for happiness, or at least for a little happiness; and happiness, in this practical sense of the word, means conditions that make work easy. Such happiness is a legitimate thing to desire. It is even our duty to strive for it, since it is less an end in itself than a means to productive effort and to spiritual growth. Law-makers and economists properly concern themselves with this problem, continually suggesting expedients and creating institutions to combat the hardships of labour and make toil more attractive and tolerable.

Legislation, social reform, individual effort, may succeed in removing some of the forms and some of the causes of unpleasant or pain-

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ful labour; and any measures that promise such relief deserve approval and encouragement. But such measures will never be able to attack directly, much less effectively combat or destroy, the element of pain that forever recurs as a necessary phase of all work. For economic measures solve economic problems; and the problem here is not economic but intrinsically ethical.

Removing the causes and the forms of objectionable labour, we shall never succeed in removing the fundamental principle of pain which is present in work whenever work comes to the individual as a moral duty. In this case there is no remedy unless we change our task from something that is external to something that is internal, from something that is imposed upon us to something that springs from within us, from a charge laid on us by others to a creation reflecting our own will, accepting it, devoting ourselves to it in the conviction that through it we are giving a deep satisfaction to our best being. If we can accomplish this, the most distasteful labour brings a smile to our faces, a smile of resignation, perhaps, not untouched by sadness but

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also brightened with a certain noble light. And afterwards, as we go back to the work that is the congenial and spontaneous interest of our lives, we feel as though we had been relieved of a burden—especially of the burden of remorse!

The labour problem, which is giving so much concern to men of our time, is essentially a problem of moral education. For no society which must work, no human society, in other words, can endure without inner discipline, and without a moral enthusiasm to sustain that discipline and make it effective. There will always be need of resignation. There will always be need of sacrifice.

XV

Imagination and the Escape from Reality

THERE was a time (the eighteenth century) when certain investigators of æsthetics, among the many essaying the difficult task of fitting the imagination into its true place in the system of the mind, identified or confused the so-called “pleasures of imagination” (play of fancy) with the “pleasure of art” (artistic creation); and so spirited did the discussion of those pleasures become that it provoked several well-known didactic poems in French and English literature. And the same identification and the same confusion reappeared in later years. They may be found in the work of Edward von Hartmann, the not over-subtle philosopher of the Unconscious; and particularly in a theory of the so-called “apparent feelings” put forward by the “sensualist,” or rather semi-sensualist, Kirchmann—a man who

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lived in the nineteenth century but belonged spiritually to the previous age.

I say “confusion,” and I will keep the word. To use, for the moment, the terminology of the old philosophy, the “pleasures of imagination” relate to “substance,” whereas the “pleasure of art” relates to “form”; or, expressing the idea in a more modern way: “form,” in art, is nothing but the contemplative attitude of the mind, and “substance,” taken by itself, is nothing but the emotional travail that accompanies action: with the consequence that the “pleasure of art” is of a conceptual or theoretical origin, while the “pleasures of imagination” originate directly from the practical.

So true is this that people long ago observed, and ever with a surprise akin to stupor, that things which are painful or disgusting when encountered “in life,” become sources of pleasure when encountered in art (Aristotle mentioned loathsome animals and decaying bodies, Boileau, “*le serpent*” and “*le monstre odieux*”). The fact is that when “pleasures of the imagination” are involved, we enjoy the sight of those things only which suggest images pleas-

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ing in themselves or capable of being used as instruments of pleasure. By "pleasure," as I use the word here, I do not mean a pleasure that is unmixed, unadulterated, simon-pure pleasure—such a pleasure is an abstraction and does not exist in reality. Nor do I mean a pleasure, even, that is prevailingly or in large part uniform, placid, or idyllic. I mean any feeling which, however varying, fluctuating or tumultuous its course, finally eventuates in pleasure. The spectacle of agony, for instance, might under certain conditions produce a sense of actual voluptuousness. So martyrdom, tasted in the imagination, might give us an exalted joy.

In view of this I have always and consistently refused to accept the theories of "contrast" and of "ugliness surmounted," which have in the past occasioned no end of philosophy-building, and which are still favourite toys of professors of æsthetics (of no great weight, I must say) in universities of Germany or other countries. They are "hedonistic" and not "æsthetic" theories. Not only have they thrown no light on æsthetic science, but they have perverted and falsified sound æsthetics.

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For when they chance to describe some real psychic process and not a mere abstraction, they relate to the “pleasures of imagination” and not to the “pleasure of artistic creation.”

And on the same grounds I have rejected Kirchmann’s theory of “apparent feelings”; except in the one case where, in accord with that theory, the pleasure is derived from the “appearance” and not from the “feeling” that underlies it—from the artistic “form,” that is, and not from the “substance.” In the pleasure born of Kirchmann’s “appearance,” we see the universal man in action, and we enjoy things—humour, ferocity, voluptuousness, gentleness, as the case may be—as a pure spectacle of humanity in the large. In the pleasure of the “feeling”—of the matter underneath the “appearance”—it is the individual man we see acting as an individual with all his particular interests, inclinations, and predilections; and here we enjoy only such things as are in harmony with our practical concerns at the moment.

It is true, of course, that some of the processes of artistic creation, properly so-called, may be used, and indeed are commonly used,

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in indulging in the “pleasures of imagination.” Certain problems of education and censorship arise, indeed, from a recognition of this fact. It may be desirable to bring certain books or certain pictures, let us say, to the attention of young people, and to keep others out of their reach. This is because the work of art need not be taken in its whole reality and considered in its purely æsthetic aspects. It may be broken up, and its “substance” used to gratify the imagination, helpfully or harmfully according to circumstances. In the case of “immoral” or “harmful” books, people are usually quite ready to distinguish between the “pleasures of imagination” and the “pleasure of art.” But the “helpful” book is just as good a proof of the distinction here indicated.

Once we have clearly understood that the “pleasures of imagination” are of practical origin, we must further be on our guard not to confuse them with the echoes that the action of the will produces in the imagination—with all the images (representations) which accompany the exercise of will in its fluctuations between hope and fear, love and hate, and so on. In the latter case the essential and determining

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factor is the quality of the volitional process itself—the objective toward which the will is exercised; whereas in the other case, the objective is the immediate pleasure or satisfaction obtained by exercise of the imagination. Whence it follows that the so-called “pleasures of imagination” are not the pleasures of activity in general, but one case always, one aspect, of hedonistic or, as I prefer to say, of utilitarian activity.

It is equally a mistake to group the “pleasures of imagination” under the general caption of “play”; for play is not an activity, but an alternation or vibration between various activities of life, the one used as relief or repose for the other—as “play,” in short. The “pleasures of imagination” are, on the contrary, actual needs of the human mind. When we cannot satisfy ourselves in a given form of reality, but still insist on having some satisfaction of one or another of our yearnings, we find that satisfaction in imagining things. Since, as a matter of fact, our needs cannot be satisfied (or at least choose not to be satisfied), it might seem the part of wisdom and good sense to suppress or overlook them. But they are so

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urgent, so assertive, that the effort to repress them would prove either costly or (in some circumstances) vain. So we find it easier and more economical to let them have their way in the imagination. A comparison that makes the situation clear is furnished by the reaction of the body to diseases. There are certain ailments which cannot be checked at the first symptoms. We have to resign ourselves to a siege, allowing them to run their course till they are vanquished by the resources of the body itself. The physician can ease the pain meanwhile, but he can do nothing more than that.

It is not, indeed, a question of pleasures that are imaginary, presumed and not actual, avowed but not real. They are actual and they are real—a reality fully taken into account in common language which describes them as “physical” and in technical language which calls them “psycho-physical” or “dualistic.” The theorists of the “apparent feelings,” Kirchmann and Hartmann, assigned to them the peculiarity of a lesser intensity as compared with “real” pleasures. But this is wholly arbitrary: they may, with equal jus-

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tice, be said to have greater intensity than the “real.”

The truth is that they are qualitatively different; and to regard them as of the same quality but of lesser (or greater) intensity as compared with the so-called “real” leads to the disappointment, so often observed and so often lamented, of finding realisation inferior to anticipation. Such disappointments can be avoided only by remembering that a dream (which has a reality all its own) is a dream and gives the pleasures of dreaming; while reality is reality and affords the differing pleasure of the real. As the wise poet of the “Vintage” counsels: “Enjoy the present and hope in the future: thus a double sweetness consoleth man.”

The needs in question, be it recalled, are needs that are unable, or *unwilling*, to find satisfaction in the sphere of the actual. And in very truth, there is no probability that dreamers would always choose to have their dreams come true. Not even in fancies of sexual passion is this the case. Men often long in their dreams for women whom they desire in no other way. And very frequently we

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give vent to the most ferocious hatreds in our imagination: we fight, we conquer, we kick, and we kill people whom we would never harm in the least if they fell into our power in real life. In fact, we quite generally note a sort of contrast between the things people enjoy in imagination and the things they actually do. Men of combat lull themselves to sleep in dreams of peace and restfulness. Men of unclean lives create worlds of innocence and purity in their minds; whereas men whose actual conduct is above reproach imagine the most horrible crimes. It is as though their imagination became a sort of refuse can for the filth and offal of their souls; and, in general, it seems to offer compensation for whatever is banished from the field of action.

In this process, as a matter of fact, bad men are not made better nor good men worse; for their wills and their objectives remain unchanged. The activity of the imagination is confined to its own world and does not intrude into the sphere of effective volition. There is no occasion even for moral censure or commendation of this caressing or seconding of certain fancies. It is a case rather of "cleaning house,"

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of liberating the mind from intrusive desires. The cruel or dissolute man dreams his dream of gentleness or virtue and then goes back to his cruelty or his dissoluteness with renewed vim.

It is a fact, however, that we feel more or less ashamed of our surrenders to the pleasures of imagination, especially as we grow riper with the years and become more earnestly conscious of life with its necessities and duties. Such mortification tends to distinguish grown people from boys and especially from young girls, who, as we say, "just live on imagination," working out great "affairs," great dramas, great romances, all in their minds, and finding in fancy the source of deep despairs and infinite consolations—the "ideal," as adolescents say, with none too much respect for that venerable word. Even races and peoples seem to differ from each other in the same way, and are sometimes so judged as inferior or superior. The inferiority of the East as compared with the West has been referred to an abuse of the pleasures of imagination in the one case (pleasures sustained even by artificial

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stimuli) and to an insistence on thought and action in the other.

However, the sense of shame we feel is easily explicable if we bear in mind the analogy suggested above between the need for compromising with the imagination and the need for dealing gingerly with certain diseases. We are never proud of our sufferings and wants nor of the steps we are forced to take to humour or relieve them. We reprove, furthermore, those who transform their diseases and "treatments" into habits, instead of applying radical remedies to the conditions which impel them now to flame with inner wrath and now to flirt in fancy with Prince Charming or the Ideal Woman. And we pass a judgment of inferiority on such peoples and individuals as artificially promote this sterile and futile life, pouring the best of their energies into a vapid play of fancy that stupefies and lulls to sleep.

XVI

Beyond Life

O to be free of the turmoil of life, to purify our souls of the poisons it has left in us, cleanse ourselves of its spots and blemishes, take our stand somewhere beyond the tumult and look back, pondering, remembering!

This impulsive yearning often flares up in us and impels our minds to go seeking. Is there not, somewhere, a place of refuge and repose? Must not such a place exist as the logical complement to life, the goal toward which all this travail must lead?

As our cold thought disintegrates this metaphysical ideal and even shows that the notion of another world and of heaven itself is contradictory and empty, we set about constructing less pretentious havens of retreat: some day we will retire from business, from politics, from the quarrels and ambitions of active life, and pass a comfortable old age with a few friends and many books and the people we love

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about us, smiling serenely as we think of the toils and troubles of the years. But then these more modest ideals also crumble under our fingers. The peace we sought is full of pains and worries. Old age is a tormented waiting upon Death, or at best (if we are really fortunate) work—work which continues, it may be at a slackened pace, the work we have always done.

And nevertheless that yearning rises in us eternally, and it must therefore have some meaning: it cannot be wholly vain. The images it suggests, in fact, are symbols, or myths, of something attainable, or even, perhaps, of something already attained or experienced.

On reaching the constellation of Gemini in his journey through Paradise, Dante let his eyes fall upon the planets and heavenly bodies below him; and far, far away, lost among the stars and small in the distances, he spied our **Globe**—“that tiny stretch of earth that fills us with such bitterness.” And Carducci, a latter-day child of Dante, once said in confidence to a friend: “My soul is weary of writing! My mind embraces—and pities!—the Universe in a flash. Why should it be damned

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therefore to the penal servitude of composition?"

At that moment, in that flash, the poets had really risen beyond the world, beyond life: the yearning they felt and which we all feel was for a passing second realised. (Only for a second? Of course, because all realisation is momentary in instants that quickly pass). And back they came to the world again, the one to his bitter stretch of earth, the other to the toil that bound him to the furrow. They came back to the world—but always to find in it the means and instruments for rising above it: the resources of Thought, and the resources of Art, that is.

The haven of refuge, the idyllic peace, the care-free liberty of self-indulgence, fancied circumstances in which life will no longer afflict us with the bitter-sweets of struggle, but will become detached from us and reduced to a mere spectacle, are unattainable only because they are duplicates and imaginative distortions of the reality wherein we actually soar beyond life and are able to look down or back upon it as a spectacle. For heaven is a reality, but it is here on this earth as an ever-present as-

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pect of the Spirit's activity. In Art and in Thought we are free of the turmoil of life, purified of its poisons, cleansed of its spots and blemishes. In Art and in Thought we escape from the tumult into a haven of refuge and repose.

XVII

The Joy of Evil

THE sheer joy we sometimes take in evil is a thing so striking to the imagination that it supplies one of the strongest arguments for belief in a positive inclination of human nature toward the wrong, in the reality of evil as a force to be set up in opposition to the good, in an “original sin” beyond the help of man, and in the consequent insuperable dualism in morals which lies at the base of all Manichisms. Says Edgar Allan Poe in “The Black Cat”: “I am not more sure that my soul lives than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties or sentiments which give direction to the character of man.”

An elementary and mitigated form of the “joy of evil” is commonly noted in our appetite for “forbidden fruit.” “Oh, would virtue had been forbidden,” says the “Yorkshire Tragedy.” “We should then have proved all

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virtuous; for 'tis our blood to love what we are forbidden." Experience, in fact, has taught us that to prohibit a thing is to make that thing an object of desire; and sometimes in despair of finally vanquishing such a desire, or else to evade the hard struggle the victory would cost, we remove the prohibition, we license the wrong we would destroy, hoping thus to cool the boiling of certain lusts, to dim the charms of certain allurements, to obviate the untoward effects of this or that excess; though we know that the compromise not only fails to weaken the impulses in question, but actually strengthens them.

This expedient is a common one in dealing with children and adolescents (and even women), and it may at times be justified by circumstances at a given moment when no sounder measures of correction are available. Perhaps the very abundance of the restrictions laid upon natural love, whether by family discipline or by civil and penal law, have so sharpened the acrid pleasures of furtive or defiant waywardness as to lead certain moralists to the conclusion that sexual passion has its true basis in a "joy of evil." The thought was

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expressed by Baudelaire not only in prose but in verses of deep inspiration and sturdy fibre:

Qui donc devant l'amour ose parler d'enfer ?

*Maudit soit à jamais le rêveur inutile
Qui voulut le premier, dans sa stupidité,
S'éprenant d'un problème insoluble et stérile,
Aux choses de l'amour mêler l'honnêteté !*

*Celui qui veut unir dans un accord mystique
L'ombre avec la chaleur, la nuit avec le jour,
Ne chauffera jamais son corps paralytique
A ce rouge soleil que l'on nomme l'amour !*

But the pleasure we take in “forbidden fruit” might well be examined closely to see whether it is really referable to a primal impulse toward evil, as a first hasty conclusion might suggest. And so examining it we find that the “pleasure of doing wrong” is simply a verbal formula of approximate description which, instead of defining the situation positively, defines it negatively, depicting its naked reality from a moral point of view and colouring the picture with immoral suggestions and therefore with moral judgments. So far as the pleasure of tasting forbidden fruit comes from

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the prohibition itself, it is the pleasure of overcoming an obstacle, a pleasure intensified in proportion as the obstacle is great. And what is there wrong in that? Is it not the same pleasure we take in laboriously mastering some hidden truth of science, or in attaining any noble objective? We commonly suppose that men of robust intellect dislike easy problems and welcome hard ones; just as men of strong character are lifted above themselves and rejoice when they are called upon to face great and bitter trials; whereas in the commonplaces of everyday life their heroism languishes for lack of a prize sufficiently glorious to stimulate it.

Certainly, some one may say, such a pleasure would be innocent enough if the obstacle in this particular case did not happen to be the moral law; indeed, because the pleasure here springs from the violation of the moral law it may properly be called a pleasure in wrong-doing. But this is the point, rather: morality here appears precisely as a "law," emanating therefore from a law-giver—another person, society, God. It is not morality, accordingly, but a brute, external, wholly non-

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rational obstacle, which gets in the individual's way and which he is happy therefore to overcome. If the law were not something cold and foreign to the individual, if it sprang from his own conscience as a limitation he sets upon himself and to which he submits voluntarily, he could never rebel against it with any satisfaction; or at least, if there were rebellion and satisfaction, these would be due to some momentary obfuscation of conscience, some temporary slip down to a lower plane, to be immediately followed by remorse. Or, going at the matter the other way round: once the individual's conscience is awakened, once the law becomes a matter of conviction, once what was a duty becomes will, passion, "love"—then the check that was formerly inoperative begins to work, the lower or repressed impulse yields to a higher and freer one, and a perverse and stupid indulgence gives place to spiritual harmony and beauty. The removal of a prohibition often has just this effect (not with children or weaklings, but with men), by giving the individual a chance to do of his own free will what he might refuse to do under constraint—not out of any contempt for morality

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but in rebellion against the oppressiveness of an arbitrary law.

However, the sweetness of the fruit forbidden is not altogether what we mean by the "joy of evil" proper; and this is something more, also, than the gratification we may feel at the sorrow or misfortune of another person, a sentiment accurately definable as the "pleasure of vengeance." In this connection it may be just as well to clear up a frequent psychological misapprehension by pointing out that, strictly speaking, it is quite impossible to feel pleasure at another person's pleasure, or pain at another's pain. The pain and pleasure of an individual are incommunicable as such; for no individual can be blended with another individual—which is another way of saying that one link in the chain of reality cannot be another link in the same chain of reality. Our joy at another's joy or our pain at another's pain is *our* joy and *our* pain, based on considerations of our own. The delight parents may take in the conjugal happiness of their children is not, surely, identical with the joys the honeymoon is bringing to the bride and groom. So the pleasure we experience at an-

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other's distress has its own spring within ourselves and is different from the suffering of the other person.

In the case of vengeance, we are moved perhaps by satisfaction at seeing a sort of justice done; in joyfully inflicting pain upon some one who has done harm to us, we may think we are freeing ourselves from danger of further harm from him or others. In rejoicing at the misfortune of an enemy we are warmed by a certain confidence that God, or Fortune, or the rhythm of life is with us as ally or co-worker. In vengeance, that is, what we enjoy is not the pain we have inflicted but the advantage we ourselves have won; and not till we have risen above this low plane of selfishness to the sphere of ethical penalties do we feel the different sort of satisfaction which comes from a sense that the moral order, and not our own individual security or profit, has been affirmed. In comparison with this latter pleasure, vengeance seems a mean and blame-worthy thing as a unilateral guarantee of our individual welfare only; and when we have attained this highmindedness, we reprove not only those who vent their private grudges, but

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also those who out of laziness or vanity or a pose of tolerance allow evil to go unpunished.

But to show the “joy of evil” in its pure, its classic, manifestation, people ordinarily point, not to the pleasures of the forbidden fruit and of vengeance, but to the disinterested enjoyment of another’s pain because it is pain—pain for pain’s sake, as it were. Schopenhauer, for example, in his review of anti-moral motives, distinguishes between selfishness and malevolence by saying that in selfishness the pain of another person is regarded as an instrument while in malevolence it is an end in itself; so that, as he continues, “selfishness, and even envy, are human failings, but the ‘joy of evil’ is of fiends and devils.”

However, in the life of the Spirit, there can be no such thing as disinterestedness, which would be equivalent to irrationality and imply the existence of effects without cause. There is an element of self-interest in the Good itself, just as there is in utterly fiendish joy; and the distinction between the latter and selfishness, like all the distinctions which Schopenhauer sets up in his Ethics, is superficial and unsound. In the pleasure we feel at a misfor-

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tune which does not touch ourselves there is a certain sense of satisfaction at finding ourselves stronger in comparison with others from the simple fact that others have suddenly become weaker than ourselves. So a farmer is the gainer by the failure of another's crop, and a merchant by the collapse of a competitor; for even if neither becomes the richer, at least he has improved or maintained his relative position in his own group. As La Rochefoucauld shrewdly (if cynically) observed: "*Il y a toujours dans le malheur d'un ami quelque chose qui nous fait plaisir.*" And in fact we always do feel at least a faint flash of joy at the misfortune of a friend. For one thing, among many, we now have an opportunity to help and comfort him. Then again, we can bring our friendship forward, and this gives added importance to our whole selves. Even when the pleasure we take in evil seems to be purely objective—artistic, so to speak—with no apparent profit to ourselves or even with some loss to ourselves, analysis which goes deep enough will always find the individual interest. It may be a question of sensuous hankerings, of morbid impulses of the imag-

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ination (people run to see accidents!), of wild and weird passions for the unusual and the extraordinary. But whatever it is, it will always have a motive which, taken by itself, is neither moral nor immoral, but merely useful for the life of the individual or for a given phase or aspect of the life of the individual. It will be pleasure at some good (some individual good) and not pleasure or joy in evil.

Considerations, these, which bring to light the element of absurdity that lurks in the notion of a "joy of evil," an absurdity placarded in the very words of the phrase itself. Because evil, when it is truly evil, when, that is, it is felt as evil, is pain and not joy; and if it is not felt as evil, then it is not evil. Indeed, if a faculty of evil existed in the Spirit, we should be called upon to delimit its field of action, for no spiritual force can be suppressed or left without expression.

As a matter of fact, the "average" or "commonplace" type of respectable citizen, starting from a false concept of the nature of good and evil, does try to delimit such a field—a very little field, with a fence around it, where he impounds his vices, in a corner or alongside

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of the more spacious field where he pastures his virtues. But unusual men, men who are not content with mediocrity, despise paltry or small-minded compromises and strike out along lines courageously drawn: either they go to extremes of unbridled license, or they toil incessantly to bring all their impulses into the domain of moral productiveness. At times, indeed, the two extremes seem to meet or to alternate in the same individual, and we get philanthropic bandits, honest thieves, self-sacrificing profligates, and the like. Then again the one will replace the other: the upright man goes wrong and goes very wrong indeed (*corruptio optimi pessima*); or the great sinner repents and becomes a great saint.

XVIII

Virtue and Compromise

THAT politics have a law of their own which is not the moral law is a truth often reluctantly and grudgingly conceded; though people are quite ready to admit that morality makes use of political compromise to attain the particular ends it holds in view. Even in this latter case, however, there is some unwillingness to reflect, and much more unwillingness openly to recognise, that among the ends toward which morality may proceed by a politic or a political method is the purpose of establishing and maintaining moral virtue itself (or virtue, merely, if you prefer the shorter term).

And yet, if it were not for such compromises, if it were not for politics, personal politics, so to speak, a “technique of virtue”—we should be put to it to discover a means for vindicating—in the midst of all our passions, with all our passions, against all our passions—the claims of morality.

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Shall we, for example, suppress our passions and replace them with “apathy” (which, etymologically, means absence of passions)? But the Stoics tried that method, and their effort is proverbially repudiated, one might say, by the connotation that “apathy” has acquired in the end: depression, reduced or lost vitality. We had better keep our passions then (since we have to anyway).

And keeping them, accepting them, shall we give them a free rein to trot and run and gallop as they please? This, too, has been tried in certain schemes of life put forward by the Romanticists of a century ago; and the criticism of it is offered by the scattering of forces, the ruin, the nausea, the opposite but more or less equivalent apathy that are reached in the mad stampede of unbridled passions.

But, still accepting them, shall we accept them in such a way that a pure and virtuous volition will face and master them, careful to avoid too close association, keeping her hands clean, lifting her spotless skirts clear of their mud, elbowing her way through the throng of such unwelcome companions, and using a whip on them as occasion requires? But this

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scheme, too, is not a new one. It is the moral "rigorism" of Emmanuel Kant, a theory of uncompromising virtue which ends, as everybody knows, in lip-service and hypocrisy. The proud (but futile) self-assertion of Pure Will against the passions may be a useful and convenient symbol of the ethical will and its autonomy; but translated into reality it either belies its words in its deeds, or wears itself out in vain struggling, to return in the end to a kind of Stoicism, which may contribute to a dignified death but not to an efficient living.

The only alternative left then is for Morality to get down from her high horse, mingle on even terms with the passions, become a passion among them, treating them civilly meanwhile, without trying either to destroy them or to do violence to their nature, fighting now one, now another, playing one against another, in alliance now with these and now with those. True ethical volition, the really moral will, is a creator and promoter of life. It need therefore have no fear of contamination in using life to obtain greater and fuller life.

This is what we actually do; and any one of us can observe in himself all the little tricks,

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all the little twists and turns, which he brings into play to create and maintain and augment that habit of well-doing which we call virtue. We often seem to feel the presence of an impassable abyss between our moral intentions and our powers of executing them. We are pulled this way and that by forces beyond our control. We know that the right thing should be done for its own sake, and yet we are discouraged and depressed by lack of justice and co-operation from others. The task ahead is clear enough, but it arouses in us none of that glowing enthusiasm, none of that sparkle of personal interest, without which we can never work to good purpose. It is our duty to rouse ourselves and begin to do something; but our heads droop in torpor and despondency. We know that we have life before us, and here we are despairing and thinking of suicide. It is the familiar rift between the spirit that is willing (or would be willing) and the flesh that is weak.

So what do we do? Do we rise in Kantian style and give orders to ourselves in a thunderous tone of military command? No, for we should be wasting our breath! Do we grit our

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teeth, clench our fists, and rush forward to execute the resplendent design that is in our minds? The trouble is that the strength for just these noble resolves is lacking. The trouble is that we are weak and languid. Any such impulsive thrust, any such heroic gesture, would fall back upon itself as a futile spasm—mock-heroic if anything.

As a matter of fact, our good sense, born of experience, tells us what to do. We choose less dramatic remedies, milder instruments more certain of their aim. We treat ourselves as children, or as invalids, now coaxing and cajoling our listless imaginations till disturbing or depressing thoughts have been wheedled away; or to the rescue of our faltering sense of duty we send some re-enforcement from our personal likes or dislikes, now appealing to our pride, now clinging to fond hopes or to illusions which we know to be illusions, but which we keep alive by artificial means; now looking forward to future joys which we think of as rewards and compensations for the trials and worries we must confront at the present time. "Vanity," says a German apothegm attributed by some to Schiller and by others to Goethe,

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“Vanity is the cement that Nature uses to unite the high and the low in man.” How monstrous this would seem to the ethics of Kant! And how human it seems to the ethics of human beings!

For in very truth, in all these tricks and twists and turns there is not a trace of impurity, not a trace of means which the good end would justify but cannot. If there were, our alliance with wrong passions would not be an alliance with mere passions (which, as such, are neither good nor bad), but with definite and concrete wrongdoing, and the contradiction would spring to light; for good actions comport with bad ones as doves comport with serpents.

The passions, big or little, which we use in the process here considered, may have been wrongful at one time in the past, and they may be wrongful again at some other time, or under some other conditions, in the future. But in the case before us, either they have ceased to be such, or they have not yet become such. They appear simply as “forces of nature,” to use a current phrase; that is to say, as resources available in one way or another for our indi-

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vidual purposes. The vanity referred to above, for example, is not a caprice which transgresses moral propriety for the sake of self-satisfaction. It is simply a foretaste of the praise or triumph we shall win, and lends itself as a docile servant to the virtue that is struggling with distracting thoughts. When Virtue has won her victory, and established herself firmly on solid ground, she will dismiss the handmaiden who came running to help her; for now the minx is no longer needed, and her chatter, were she to stay on, might disturb a work already on its way again and now proceeding in the full flush of its own inner conviction and enthusiasm.

XIX

Faith and Abstention from Thought

AMONG the “duties” sometimes laid upon us, there is one which seems to be very strange: the duty, under given conditions, *not* to think. It is a duty that men of strenuous life are inclined, rather than not, to overdo: “This is a case,” they say in excuse, “not for thinking but for action!” “Wise or unwise, this is what I am going to do!” “Do it first, and think about it afterwards!”

But strenuous men do not observe that this particular “duty” was thought of not for them but for their opposites: for timid, irresolute, faint-hearted souls. The fear that shrinks from action and inhibits action is born of an endless exploration of the risks and obstacles which achievement meets along its path. The perfect flincher, following the logic of his failing, ought really to forego living, dying out of love of fear, as certain zealots starve out of love of God. For no limits can be set to the

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possibilities of apprehension: allayed at one point, fear crops up again at some other. There is always something to be afraid of somewhere. And if the timorous man makes up his mind to be bold at last, there appears to be no reason why he should wait so long, wasting time that could be used to such good purpose otherwise.

The error that enmeshes the timid soul is his belief in a life which carries with it no hazard of death. So when he is enjoined to stop thinking and begin doing, he is urged simply to abandon the pursuit of something he will never find, and to resign before a problem which is not a problem, but a creation of his own disordered fancy. In reality, he is not asked not to think, but to begin thinking in earnest.

This analysis holds just as well for the opposite precept: "Look before you leap," which is addressed to reckless, impetuous people. The mistake they make is not in their willingness to act in the face of risks and perils but in their inclination to disregard the real problems of thought, to omit the necessary study and deliberation that precede effective action.

But another caution against "thinking" is

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put forward in the name of “faith,” as though thought and faith stood in opposition to each other, whether to act as substitutes reciprocally or to divide the field of knowledge between them in good accord. In point of fact, this second notion is the more common. People like to draw a line and say: “Here is the proper domain of thought and here the proper domain of faith”; or indeed, faith is given a commanding position over thought, which is assigned to a secondary or subordinate rôle and devotes itself to reasoning from premises supplied by faith.

All of which is false. The only sound element in this attitude is the distinction implicitly drawn between two quite different situations in the mind. For faith and thought are not to be identified with each other, nor do they destroy each other, nor do they divide the mental field by amicable compromise. The fact is simply that when faith takes possession of the mind, thought comes to an end, and when thought takes possession of the mind, faith comes to an end.

And why? Because faith is nothing but the result of thinking, and only on something that

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has been thought can we rest in the unshakable conviction that we have the truth, that we are really enlightened, that we know what we ought to do in this or that or the other situation in life. Every faith is the product of a rational process, even when the process has led to belief in a revelation or an authority. And when a faith has been shattered, there is no way of mending it, or finding a substitute for it, except by thinking. One may perhaps use violence upon one's self and resort, as we say, to "suggestion." But this course, though it may prove convenient, will never be honest; and ministers of religion who sometimes recommend or practise it are Jesuits sinning against the Holy Ghost—against the Spirit of Sincerity, I mean.

Would you who have lost your faith believe again? Be not afraid of thinking, even though your critical eye take you to the very roots of things. Those who seek by thought and meditation shall surely find.

Be of good faith and you will be rewarded with a faith that is good!

XX

Humility

SOMETIMES when our lives seem to be running smoothly along the guide-lines of virtue and we feel that we are doing everything that duty and conscience require, a great doubt assails us. Are we really good? May it not be that our seeming integrity is just mere conformity, external and accidental, with the Law—product, or part product, of fortunate circumstance, without any trustworthy guarantee of our real strength of character?

At such times we find a very ominous resonance in the imprecations of the poet on the “race of Abel,” or in the sarcastic references of the novelist to the “rascality of honest men”; and anxiously we ask ourselves whether we, too, placed in other environments, exposed to other dangers, would succeed in maintaining our present high estate and avoid becoming, to our shame, like men from whom we now withdraw in anger and in horror. In this tor-

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turing perplexity we are seized with a feverish craving to put ourselves to the test by provoking some extraordinary trial. Fortunately, the occasion is rarely offered us by the placid march of events which does not stop to reassure us in the hoped-for enjoyment of our own self-conceit and self-esteem.

The poet Alfieri suffered a great deal from just such misgivings. "No matter how hard I tried to believe and to make others believe that I was different from the generality of men, I feared" (he says in his *Diaries*) "that I was very like them." And in his celebrated sonnet of auto-portraiture he confesses that he thought himself "now Achilles and now Thersites," and for real moral values he could discover no trustworthy measure other than Death:

O son of Adam, art thou gold or clay?
Die, and the knowledge cometh!

But not even death is unfailing proof. Cowards and sinners have been known to die with courage; just as good men have faced their passing with fear and dread. Death at the most bears witness to the spiritual vitality

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present in a man at the moment of agony: it says nothing about the quality of a character.

This eagerness to assay our true moral worth, to have a definite gauge of the strength of our moral fibre, inspires some of the ideals and practices of asceticism. People withdraw from the world and its pleasures, seek deliverance from the bonds of the flesh, detach themselves from family and friends, allotting to each, of course, the dues prescribed by the commandments, but careful always not to let the emotions become involved, lest things be done out of affection or pleasure which should be done wholly from a sense of duty. This particular quirk of asceticism reappears, as has been noted, in the ethics of Kant.

In reply to Kant and to ascetics in general it has been pointed out that the scruple in which they are here entangled is a more or less specious one. It is sheer absurdity to think of morality as an endless struggle against our passions, which, after all, make up the substance of life and may properly be repressed only as they assert themselves by and for themselves, apart from the moral outlook which reduces them to unity and harmony.

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And passing to the attack from this defensive position, it has been observed that the desire for gratuitous heroism, the self-conscious aim of living in meticulous acquittal of duty—all the major concerns of the ascetic, in short—are themselves sins of refined selfishness, since they tend to regard the world as an arena for celebrating the triumph of our individuality, as a stage for the vainglorious display of our virtues. Meanwhile the world stands in need not of perfect characters to be admired in various poses, but of useful, efficient work, even though the doing of that work “leave Honesty appalled” and be attended with many shocks of error and blemishes of weakness.

The truth is that this solicitude for perfection is connected with a well-known concept of the old metaphysics which bears its proper fruit in a perversion of ethics. It is the so-called monadistic notion of individuality which in ethics takes the form of egoism. Our own “inner selves,” our own “real selves,” our own “substantial egos”—those hard, however radiant, jewels which we are said to possess within us, which distinguish us from all or many or common mortals, and which we must

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not keep under bushels if we would preserve their splendour undimmed—exist only in false theories of metaphysics or amid the intoxicating fumes of self-adoration. Our characters are not altogether ours, and the characters of others are ours also: it is the universal always that is truly real.

If we denote the sin of ethical monadism with the name that really describes it—if we call it “pride”—the virtue that corresponds to it, the virtue that springs from the very essence of anti-monadistic and idealistic philosophy, must be called “humility.” This humility is nothing but a realisation on our part that our actions belong not to an entity or substance that is individual, but to all reality which is forever varying the conditions that determine them. No one therefore can feel secure as in a citadel of virtue and look down upon others as beings of different or inferior nature. From any one of those beings an act or a word may some day come that will make us blush for shame as we compare it with words and deeds of ours. At any time each of us may find himself in crying need of indulgence. And humility transforms proud nicety of scruple into

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watchful conscientiousness which devotes itself to its work in life, with full appreciation of the dangers and difficulties that confront it; and humbling itself in this work, finds therein its only grandeur.

XXI

A Word for Imperfection

FROM the frequency with which all of us have to ask indulgence for our share of human frailty, one would think that the uncompromising moralist would be a hard man to find. Yet we meet him at every turn in the road. To the excessive annoyance of people of good sense, and to the torture and discouragement of simple-minded saintly souls, he is always on hand, ready, however loath we are to follow his pointing finger, to turn the storied fabric we have been admiring and compel us to note the crude design on the under-side. Here are men reputed to be “strong”; but this deep-seeing critic can show how really “weak” they are. Here is an act we may have thought courageous: he will lay bare one by one the fears and shrinkings leading up to it—expert in ferreting out selfishness and meanness where we have seen nobility and virtue. How often

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during the late war were we reminded—on the chance that we might have forgotten—that war really has no heroes: that the soldier goes forward because he dares not run away; that he is usually so crushed spiritually and physically, that life and death are alike indifferent to him; that vanity, rather than devotion, prompts many of the feats we call sublime.

The worst of it is that, for the most part, such criticisms taken one by one are unanswerable and true. But the truth they convey, instead of enlightening us and giving us courage and joy—the normal effect of any serious dictum of truth—fills our minds with confusion and our hearts with gloom; and we feel somehow that all we have heard is true enough, but at the same time utterly false.

To what conclusions, in fact, are we carried along such lines? To the denial that good exists? But the human soul in every one of its impulses affirms the reality of the good—on no other premise would it function at all. To such an exalted concept of the good that it cannot be attained in this world? But an ideal that can be actualised only beyond the sphere

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of human life is no ideal at all—it is just a futile fancy. To depreciation of a mean and miserable present with reference to a glorious past, or of past and present with reference to a radiant future? But the very same forces operative in the present have been operative in the past and will be operative in the future (reality is always one!).

The truth is that we get nowhere; and the whole argument, therefore, is certainly false. According to the perfectionist a justice and a mercy he does not show his neighbour, we may overlook the psychological motivations, often base enough, which underlie his censoriousness. It is sufficient to expose the misapprehension that vitiates all his thinking: his concept of a perfect virtue, which, to be thus perfect, must come into being instantaneously and proceed, in a straight line, without hesitation, slip, or compromise, to the end—perfect in its inception, perfect in its process, perfect in its completion. One gets the picture of a gymnast executing a somersault backward, and then presenting himself to the applause of an admiring throng; as though virtue obtained its full reward only as it has passed an examina-

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tion and received solemn approval from the critical as something absolutely above reproach!

A beautiful conception of conduct indeed, unless we choose to call it the ugliest imaginable. Beautiful as a mechanism, but disgustingly ugly as a living vital thing; beautiful as an abstraction, but ugly as a reality; beautiful as something which does not exist in the eyes of people silly enough to like non-existing things; but ugly for people who demand, as a prerequisite of their worship, that the thing they worship have one plain, common, ordinary attribute: existence!

Life, as we all know, is not perfect, for the very reason that it is life, development therefore, progression, struggle, change. Only the non-living, the dead, the fixed, the changeless, may be called "perfect." On what does the morality of the moral act or intention depend, and from what does it arise? From nothing? From a sudden gesture or insurgence in the void? Or is it not rather an engraftment on the trunk of our special impulses and individual passions, hot with the blood of life, grimy with the grime of life, of which it is not a

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negation but a function and an expression? Morality is this last and nothing else. (Morality is born only of struggle, and struggle implies hesitation, wavering, yielding, failure, defeat; all of which mean not inertness but struggle anew; so that from defeat we return to new effort, we regain lost ground, we progress, we go beyond the level from which we fell; then we fail again, and we recover again, and again, and again, and again, each failure leading to a higher and higher recovery.

And sometimes the enemies we are fighting—our passions, our selfish interests in the things we selfishly desire—are so strong and so aggressive that we dare not or cannot meet them face to face. So we compromise, consenting to give battle on their lower level, meeting them on their own ground and on their own terms, trying to weaken them by setting one off against the other. More of us than are aware of it carry on struggles of just this kind. How many of us do our best things or refrain from doing our worst, in order to win the applause and the rewards that virtue brings, or to avoid public disapproval, or to win the smile of a woman we love, or to spite a rival whom we

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would force to recognise our merit and success?

What wonder that the soldier should require dire punishments to ensure his courage under fire? Even the man attracted to letters and art by a powerful inspiration often finds his spirit failing and has to resort to expedients and constraints. Alfieri certainly had the “tragic fury” if any one ever had; yet he wearied under the long strain of writing his plays; and to keep at his work he would have his head clipped, so that he would not dare go out of doors; and at other times, he would have his valet tie him into his chair. And what were these, from the perfectionist’s point of view, but compromises—ennobled after a fashion by the end they held in view? They are of course directly opposite to the “directions of intent”—the “lines of least resistance”—of Jesuitical ethics. For the Jesuitical compromise adapted ideals to personal interest or convenience; whereas Alfieri’s devices pressed lower motivations into the service of the higher.

“Swallow or strangle” says an Italian proverb of the dolorous alternative. And when

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we compromise, in such ways, we choose to swallow rather than to strangle. Compromise operates in the moral life as the temporary expedient. It is the drug in the crisis of fever. It is the prop under the falling wall. True ethical culture strives to consolidate and enlarge the domain of the moral will, to make it over into a habit or virtue which will have less and less need of compromises and of less and less serious ones, transforming the compromise which is an alliance between the high and low in us into a compromise which means mastery of the higher over the lower. When a man has accomplished this transformation, he is a good man, an upright man, a hero, a saint.

But he is such only in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of other people; and that is why all heroism, all saintliness, all virtue, has a deal of legend attached to it. In his own conscience the hero does not see himself as heroic, nor the saint as saintly, nor the good man as good. Where others fail to observe defects he is perfectly aware of them. Where others fail to see impurities, he feels them and is ashamed of them. Where others find only courage he remembers fear and trembling. And that is why

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the saint has his scruples and his crises of remorse, why the good man is humble and charitable, and the hero modest and unassuming.

“In the eyes of other people,” I said; but I meant, of course, people of good sense and charitableness, or simple-minded reverent souls, for our fault-finding perfectionists, on their part, never see anything but defects, weaknesses and impurities. And in this they think they are very discerning, whereas in reality they are very obtuse, if obtuseness consist in losing sight of the action in the maze of its incidents, of the big in the little, of the drama of world-building humanity in the waverings, faintings, and set-backs that attend every fruitful effort of the race. They think as they do because they have that particular ideal in mind—the jack-in-the-box ideal of pure and perfect virtue. It is a logical mechanism, we must admit, solidly constructed of sound and elastic steel. But we do not like men of steel, however sound and elastic. We prefer men of flesh and blood. And that is why we reverently embrace the only virtue that is real, the only virtue that is virtue, the virtue, in other words, that is imperfect.

XXII

The Individual, Grace and Providence

IF we seek a definition for what is ordinarily called “the individual,” we get an answer that has a strangely paradoxical sound: “The individual is an institution.” And yet, no other answer has any meaning. For individuality is a product of the Spirit; and the Spirit forms and transforms, integrates and disintegrates, the groups and relations of tendencies, habits, and aptitudes which constitute the individuality, no less than it forms and transforms so-called historical or social institutions—ancient slavery, mediæval serfdom, the Roman family, the Christian family, the Hindu caste. These may be considered as so many individuals living and dying as truly as Cæsar or Napoleon lived and died.

It may be objected that these latter individualities are not conscious of themselves as the others—individuals commonly so-called—

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are conscious of themselves, and this fact would establish a great difference between the two planes of individuality. However, the argument is fallacious. The truth is that social institutions have no reality outside their consciousness of themselves, the consciousness of Roman, Christian, slave, or Brahmin that he is Roman, Christian, slave, or Brahmin, a consciousness which sets itself off from the consciousness these individuals have of themselves in their other aspects. If such self-consciousness seems at times inadequate, inadequate also at times was the self-consciousness of Cæsar, or Napoleon, or any other individual.

Nor can the difference be located in another trait—the impulse toward self-conservation and self-assertion, which is common to individuals and to all other institutions and in them all is nothing but life itself. A life bestowed upon them by the Spirit that they may live and die, completing their peculiar cycle and performing their peculiar function! A life of pain and travail, but also of trust and joy! A life which wills to continue living and which, in order so to continue, transforms itself, and transforming itself is gradually ex-

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hausted till it perishes! And there is no contradiction in all this, save in the philosophical sense in which all life, all change, is contradiction.

For this reason the individual feels at one with the All and senses as selfish—which is the same as insane or diseased—any effort he may make to stand by himself apart from the All or in opposition to the All, withdrawing into the segregation of his own individuality which he experiences as segregation but also as communion, as isolation but also as participation. Every individual feels that his work in life is a charge entrusted to him, and that the strength he does it with is a loan for which he must give an accounting. As moments come when he seems to lose contact with things, when his soul dries up, he lifts his eyes to an Eternal Father, he invokes the All, that it may flow back into him, give him courage and life again, help him, force him onward toward a goal. He prays for Grace. He counts on Grace—and not in vain.

So the poet counts on Grace, though he calls it inspiration; so the philosopher, who calls it understanding; so the statesman, who calls it

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farsightedness and tact; so the soldier, who calls it courage and morale. But it comes also to the most humble and lowly man in the world, who sometimes does not know how he is to live the day out, so black does the horizon appear—and lo, in a burst of sunlight or in a glimpse of meadow fresh with dew, Grace descends upon him; and his heart swells with a new joy and a new zest for living. Who but some fatuous boaster (and he only in his idle words) could ever pretend to stand all by himself and forego the helping hand of Grace?

We should, however, beware of theological statements of the concept of Grace. Erecting a barrier between the All and the individual, between God and man, the theologian is soon caught in a dilemma: he is forced either to suppress God or to suppress man. Religions made of the sterner stuff face the issue squarely and do away with man, though our eclectics of all kinds, whether Catholic or Protestant, prefer to flounder about in the dualisms of a *gratia præveniens* coming from God and a *gratia co-operans* coming from man. However, if we think of Grace, not as an intervention on the part of an external power, but as an

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ebb and flow, an alternating throb, of a single power, we avoid the pitfalls of the theologian, while recognising the importance of the notion he puts forward and tries to elaborate.

In a similar way, and also through the defective expositions of theology primarily, the importance and soundness of the idea of Providence have been recognised. The difference between Providence and Grace is this: that Grace relates to spiritual power in general, while Providence relates to the particular problem assigned to the individual in particular circumstances. Our imaginations are free to dream of our doing one thing or another thing, as we may choose; though what we actually do is decided not by ourselves, but by "Providence," which permits us to do this or that, this and not that, as the case may be. Whether, thereupon, we do it reluctantly or with joy depends upon the measure in which Grace is vouchsafed us. Fatuous people, to be sure, talk (and again it ends in talk) of doing things born of abstract imagining and not called for and not warranted by the logical sequence of facts as they are. But serious people intently watch themselves and the reality of things

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about them to be ready to answer the signal of Providence. Just as we pray for Grace when our spirit fails, so we rely on Providence and hope in Providence for the efficient and opportune use of our resources.

XXIII

Providence

THE idea expressed in such formulas as "Providence," the "Logic of Events," the "Necessity that transcends the individual," the "History that is stronger than we are," and other synonyms still, has been, in the past, disparaged as of a transcendental and mythological character. Such it was, unquestionably, and such it may become again. But that does not affect a kernel of real and authentic truth to be discerned in it.

When a poet, for example, sets out to translate his inspiration into words, he usually begins, as is commonly observed, with certain practical aims and intentions, with certain pre-conceived ideas or methods. And it is also commonly remarked that if he is a true poet, if his inspiration is genuine and strong, he overcomes the obstacles laid in his path by these inadequate aims, intentions, preconceptions; and he writes his masterpiece in spite of them.

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As we say, he overcomes them; but not by destroying them, brushing them aside, breaking them down by critical analysis. The opposite is usually the case. The poet thinks he has realised his practical aims and followed his artistic theories—at least to a certain large extent, barring necessary compromises. And how does this illusion arise? It arises, like all illusions, from the pleasure we take in having illusions, and from our determination to create them for ourselves, as sedatives for our misgivings, as solaces for our scruples. “Unhappiness to pleasing fancy facile credence gives,” said Ariosto sententiously. But are the illusions of the poet in question true illusions? No, because they are not recognised as such, and such therefore they cannot be: they are acts of will, useful for the purpose the poet holds in view. Now after the work is done, the critic may examine the process of the poet’s poetic creation, or the artist, turning auto-critic and auto-historian, may do so himself. Then these various acts of will will be called “illusions,” and the poetry itself “reality.” It will be said that the logic of the poetry was sounder than the logic of the poet. It will be

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said that Providence has guided the poet's pen without his knowledge and contrary to his intentions. And these things will be well said, and these names well called, provided the critic, if he be of a philosophical turn of mind, understand that it is not a question of reality in the one case and of illusion in the other, but of reality in both cases—of reality on two different planes or in two different forms.

The experience of the thinker is much the same, as may be seen in the instance of Vico. Vico naïvely set out to construct a philosophical system adapted to Christian Commonwealths; and absorbed in this mission, firm in his own faith, he devised and put to use a number of highly explosive propositions most perilous to his faith. The logic of his thinking proved stronger than his logic as a believer.

And so it is in the moral sphere. Often, our hearts, as we say, give wiser counsel than our heads. We refrain from doing things which our ordinary norms of conduct should require us to do, but which an inner voice somehow forbids (even urging us to do the opposite); and thus our behaviour comes suddenly into

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conflict with all the principles we have stood for. But later on, as we look back upon what has happened, we lift a prayer of thanksgiving to Providence, which laid its **Holy Hand** upon our heads and withheld us from the mistake we should logically have made.

Now, in all these cases, the metaphors to which language has recourse in describing them suggest a dualism, and therefore in the nature of the case, a transcendence: man and Logic, man and Providence, man and *force majeure*. But the dualism and the transcendence exist only in the language; for what is really demonstrated is not a dualism but a dialectical process. It is the dialectic of the Spirit in the variety-unity of its forms, the process whereby poetry, thought, and action, each in its turn, arise, one spiritual form vanquishing, overriding, the other spiritual forms by its sheer assertiveness, but not winning such an easy victory as to dispense with the stratagems of inner spiritual warfare—the “wiles of Reason,” as they have been called.

If now we consider not the particular process of each of these spiritual forms, but the composite process of the mind as a whole, we may

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quite properly speak of a "Logic of Events," a "Higher Necessity," a "Reason," a "Providence," which guides human affairs despite individual human beings. For we will simply be drawing a distinction between the positive activity of the Spirit and the Negative, or non-being, which attends this Positive at every moment and which, at every moment, is overpassed thereby. This Negative is not a part of reality, but reality (which, being light, is therefore at the same time darkness). Now figures of speech take the one phase of reality and set it off in opposition to the other. On the one hand we place the human, the earthly, the individual, the mortal; on the other the divine, the heavenly, the universal, the immortal. The metaphor remains metaphorical, but the thought is none the less soundly thought. People may take the metaphor in literal terms and personify it. They may transform the thought into mythology. The fault, however, lies not with the metaphor nor with the thought; but with such loosely thinking people.

The idea of Providence is not merely irreprehensible. Even in its emphatic and somewhat poetical form, it carries a great and salu-

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tary message, asserting the reality of the Spirit, which means the rationality of the universe, against all systems, whether of sensualistic or naturalistic origin, based on ephemeralism, phenomenalism or arbitrarism. Without this idea, we could never understand a work of art, a philosophy, an action, or history itself; for to understand a thing is to *think* the intrinsic purpose or reason of its existence, its logic and its necessity, the Providence, in other words, that governs it.

To be sure, the concept of Providence may be perverted into a mythology, as Nature, Evolution, or any other idea, may be. And it happens actually to have come to us from the mythologies and religions, especially from Christianity which has supplied the words and phrases in which it is expressed. But such words and phrases need not give umbrage to the thinker. They linger on in philosophy as escutcheons of a noble lineage of which the philosopher may well be proud!

XXIV

Responsibility

IT is noteworthy that in our time the discussion of the freedom or non-freedom of the will has lost something of the impassioned tone that distinguished the hot controversies on the subject prevailing forty or fifty years ago. The vehemence of the dispute in those days was due to the humiliation and despair so widely felt as a result of the then dominant naturalism or determinism and the so-called "moral statistic" that went with that type of thought. People at all sensitive on such matters suddenly found themselves, by judgment of the Court of Science, deprived of the freedom of their own souls and caught in a mechanism from which there was no escape.

They dealt with the situation according to temperament. Some were inclined to acquiesce and resigned themselves to their fate. Others rose in vigorous rebellion, though they were painfully conscious of the impotence of

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their rebellion. The new, or at least supposedly new, thesis was the "determinism of volition," and against it were thrown the disorganised cohorts of the old-fashioned doctrines of free-will, together with eclectic or conciliatory modifications of those doctrines. The debate, with all the inadequacies and misunderstandings which kept it alive, not only overflowed into literature (famous was Zola's great cycle dealing with the Rougon-Macquarts) but even invaded the tribunals of justice. On every pretext and occasion lawyers talked of "heredity," of "environment," of "forces stronger than the individual." This was the heyday of "expert testimony" and of publicity for the "man of science." Neuropaths and psychopaths could be found at every trial, summoned by the defence to show the irresponsibility of the criminal at the bar.

But gradually the excitement died down and the disputes were forgotten—one way, as I think I have said somewhere, of solving philosophical problems that are insoluble because badly stated. People recovered their spirits. The gloom lifted. Naturalism had promised much more than it could ever deliver, and the

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tyranny it had exercised gave ground before good sense. Philosophy re-established contact with its nobler traditions; and so when it returned once more to this problem of free will, it was able to consider the matter dispassionately and calmly.

The fact is that the question of free-will has no meaning when Necessity and Freedom are set up in opposition, on the theory that one precludes the other or that one must limit or modify the other. It acquires significance—and with significance, a solution—only as Freedom and Necessity are identified.

The act that is truly free is the act which our Spirit performs because it can perform no other, the act which is wholly in harmony with our being at a given moment under given conditions, the act which comes as the solution of a problem prepared for us by the past but which we state in our own terms and solve for ourselves. To hold any other view than this would force us to say that a thinker thinks mechanically and not freely because he follows the necessity of logic, or that a painter paints mechanically and not freely when he obeys the laws of his art.

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But to recognise this situation is to recognise that the individual is not responsible for his action, in the sense that the action is not an arbitrary choice on his part and therefore no praise and no blame, no reward and no punishment, are due to him because of it. This may seem paradoxical, but its truth becomes apparent in the perfect form of knowing—historical knowledge.

In history, actions are explained, characterised, understood, but never praised or blamed; and they are attributed not to individual authors but to the whole historical progression of which they are aspects or constituents.

It is this truth that appears so beautifully in the often noted modesty of the great, who are conscious that they have acted as instruments of something beyond themselves. And it appears, conversely, in the brazen frankness of certain rascals who claim to have done what they did because they could not do otherwise, subject as they were to an irresistible compulsion.

So then, if a person is, in the last analysis, not responsible for his actions, how can he be responsible—since it must be evident that what

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I have just said betrays no intent to release the world from moral responsibility?

The answer is a simple one: we are not responsible, but we are *held* responsible. And what so holds us to responsibility is society, which insists on certain kinds of action and says to the individual: "If you do as I bid, you will be rewarded; if you disobey, you will be punished. You know what you are doing, and you know what I demand: therefore I declare you responsible for the things you do. To be sure, following your own inclinations to my disadvantage, you can allege a good excuse in the Necessity constraining you. But what good will that do you? I shall take no account of it. I ask for no excuses. I am interested in attaining the ends I have in view. I therefore exert all possible pressure upon you to realise my purposes through you; but if you prefer my chastisement to my praise, I shall work through others instead of through you."

Some such language we use even toward ourselves in our inner individual lives, which may be thought of as a kind of society in miniature. We set ourselves an objective or an ideal, and by that very fact we assume re-

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sponsibility for attaining or not attaining it. Remorse is a process of reviewing what we have done and of rousing ourselves to do differently in the future. Our actions represent what we are. We are grieved at having been or at being such as they show us to be; so we reproach ourselves—that is to say, we strive to change, and in fact, we do gradually change, thanks to the remorse we suffer. But if we were suddenly to pass from the practical attitude of mind where our will is intent on its creative effort, to a theoretical or contemplative attitude, and if we were then to examine what we have done from the latter point of view, we would develop no remorse, and any we might have been feeling would be quieted. For now we would understand just how and why it was that we did what we did; and we would have no occasion to repeat the adage that "*tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*", since feeling no remorse we could feel no need of forgiveness.

Assumption of responsibility proves, therefore, to be a phase of the dialectic of action. It arises out of practical considerations; and from this it follows that we cannot logically

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deduce from the quality of an action the kind and amount of punishment or recompense belonging to it. Penalties and rewards are determined by the urgency of social and historical needs. At one moment they will be very great for actions that at other times will be exempt from penalty or considered unworthy of reward. But whatever their degree, whatever the conditions of their application, penalties and rewards presuppose that the individual to whom they are applied is able to understand what he has done and what was expected or required of him. Only positivists and believers in determinism could think crudely enough to confuse the idea of "punishment" as a means of influencing the volition of the members of a social system, with the so-called "protection of society" from certain dangers; and consequently to ask for the condemnation and elimination of violent lunatics and professional criminals on the same footing. Even granting that a society might do well to put lunatics to death, such a policy would be a policy of public hygiene and not of ethical education, since it could have no effective influence on the consciences of its citizens. On

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the other hand, the death penalty does conserve its status as a punishment as regards the criminal; for the criminal can think and he can understand; he possesses the elements essential for a change of heart.

XXV

Hope and Fear

WHY do we disapprove equally of the incorrigible optimist and the man who is always afraid of the future—the former less than the latter, but both after all with the same disapproval? What more natural, what more unavoidable, than that a man who is living and working in this world should look ahead, the better to prepare himself for whatever may happen? And why therefore should he not rejoice if the prospects seem attractive, or evince his fears and misgivings if things look dark? Unless we hoped and feared, life would have no meaning for us. Apart from such commotions of our inner selves, there could be no living. They constitute the cosy warmth and the anguished fever of human existence, painful, distracting, but yet so dear to us that we often dream of living forever, caressing in the fancy an immortality in which that cosiness and that fever, or the fever tempered to cosi-

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ness, shall endure perpetually like the undying light of the alchemists, never burning out themselves, never exhausting the fuel in our souls.

But we may be sure that our disapproval, or our ridicule, or our opposition, does not bear upon the hope and the fear as such. What we censure in this connection is the disposition toward hope or toward fear. We blame the man who hopes and the man who fears. Hope and fear are precious parts of life and precious aids to living. But they lose their value, they become sources of weakness and embarrassment, when they are fixed as attitudes, habits, points of arrival. If anxiety lays hold on a man and comes to dominate his personality, he is paralysed; he is reduced to impotence. Losing confidence in himself, he finally thinks of himself as finished, as dead. And hopefulness operates in the same way. It blunts the acuteness of our vision; it saps the energy of our action, lulling us to repose in the fatuous confidence that things will turn out right anyway.

If we tend to be less severe toward the sanguine than toward the timorous individual, the reason probably is that the former is less de-

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pressing to most of us; though he will not fare any better at the hands of the truly wise. The proverbs of my own country have dealt extensively with the kill-joy, but they have by no means left the optimist unscathed. "Live on hope and you'll die in the poor-house," says the Italian of the South. "Live hoping, die singing," says the Tuscan, somewhat less sharply. And this latter adage hints quite properly that the special kind of cheerfulness the hopeful man enjoys is better adapted to poetry and song than to efficient counsel of one's self or of others. It may be further noted that of these two types of prognosticators each proves the other wrong. The timorous always have arguments to blast the hopes of the over-buoyant, and the optimist is ever ready with his cure for a fear.

But in the books of the philosophers and of the poets we may read that life is nothing else than hope and that hope goes with us from the cradle to the grave. The hope they speak of is something complete and absolute, threatened by no shadow of doubt or worry. As they describe and define it, such a hope would seem to be impossible in the light of the processes

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of hoping and fearing suggested above, where these two aspects of foresight are taken together as a “yes” and a “no.” What then is this hope that never fails us, that no misgiving can disconcert?

It is the intimate abandonment of a man to reality, the deep feeling he has that since things are they can be only for the best. It is not a speculation as to the favourable or unfavourable outcome of events, but a recognition that whatever is is favourable, that is to say, is rational and providential, logical in the progression of history. It is reverence before the wisdom of God.

Such a hope is not confidence in a probability, but security in a certainty. It is not fancy, but thought. As hope it is not relative and contingent: it is absolute. It is not hope at all, but surety and faith. In comparison with this hope, the hopes and fears that properly bear such names almost fade from view. They are not suppressed or inhibited. They become simple instruments or parts of life, tempered and restrained in the All in which they continue to fulfil their proper functions without abusing their prerogatives and without dispirit-

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ing the life they were called on to promote. *Nec spe nec metu*, it used to be said of the true sage, the truly superior man, who never exults in hope nor despairs in fear. Not because he is indifferent or insensitive and lives on a plane far above common emotions (not even stones are wholly numb, except in the metaphors of the poets); but because he has acquired the power of transcending his emotions, harmonising them in a feeling of supreme assurance.

XXVI

Objects of Worship

It cannot be denied that the doctrine which integrates religion with philosophy by considering religion as a sort of *philosophia inferior* proves vaguely unsatisfactory at times even to those who hold in general to an immanentist concept of reality. And this uneasiness, if we carefully observe, arises almost always from a failure to find in philosophical thought any trace of the religious life as worship, as awe, as hope, as "fear of God." This provokes the rejoinder that religion belongs to the sphere of the practical and not to the sphere of thought, at least not purely to the sphere of thought—an answer that leaves the problem just where it was.

But the doubt in question derives from the scant attention that is commonly paid, and from the hasty examination that is usually devoted, to the particular manner in which religion is reduced to philosophy—to that spe-

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cific “lower philosophy” which the mythological method, or “mythologism,” constitutes.

Now, we must bear in mind, on the one hand, that religion is mythology; and that mythology is a conception of reality where universals are personified, and pure ideas are replaced by a body of imagery, to explain the origins, laws, and purposes of the universe. And on the other hand, we must bear in mind the practical problem of the Supreme Good, of Happiness, of Beatitude. Putting these two propositions together, we are in a position to see how and why the mythological conception of things must carry with it a feeling different from the mood induced by philosophy.

It is well known that, as a combined result of the practical concerns of people and the use of fanciful universals or empirical generalisations, idols or fetishes come into being, and these in turn are taken as sources of good or evil; whence things (or people, if you wish—it makes no difference here) are good and evil, useful or harmful, beautiful or ugly—judgments and criteria of judgment, which ethical thought, no less than æsthetic science, must criticise and demolish, showing that only actions

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are real, that all the rest is metaphor. But these idols that are set up, these metaphors that are corporealised, nevertheless play their part in the life of the Spirit, giving direction to our actions, establishing convenient points of agreement, guide-posts marking the broad lines of human aspiration.

Now in myth-making, considered as a manner of interpreting reality, we find a provisory assembling and systematisation of semi-fanciful and semi-conceptual images, which serve the Spirit, in its practical phase, as objects of attraction or repulsion, of love or terror, of reverence, veneration, or hope—they are subjects for judgments of value, in short. It is for this reason that religion or mythology seems to be not so much a manner of interpreting reality, not so much a “lower philosophy,” as a drama of will and action—not so much thought, as feeling and conduct.

Philosophy, on the other hand, overthrows such idols, such objects of worship. For thing-values it substitutes action-values, and therefore the values of actions taken one by one, and case by case. It seems, accordingly, to breathe a chilling draught upon a world once

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warmed with the breath of love; though, in point of fact, it is far from abolishing emotion and will, promoting rather a more virile manner of feeling and willing, which draws its vigour from the depths of the Spirit and not from fetiches of any kind.

But we love our idols precisely because they are idols, symbols, that is, of things we love; and in a certain way we love even the idols that stand for the opposite of those we worship for their goodness. This is because the existence of the former is suggested dialectically by the existence of the latter: the Devil is a guaranty of the potency of God, and doubts cast upon the Devil tend to undermine faith in God. So if the criticism that philosophy makes of religion is a torment to our brains, it is a stab that causes our hearts to bleed; and reason is cursed in prose and in verse (especially in verse) by numberless souls who cannot forgive the destruction of their gods, the downfall of their idols; and by wistful people in whom straight thinking and clear thinking never quite compensate for the loss of fancies that are dear to them.

They never quite compensate, because the

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joys occasioned in the one case are qualitatively different from the joys occasioned in the other; and no joy is ever a perfect substitute for any other joy. The emptiness left in our lives by the death of some one we love may be filled by more energetic application to study or to work or to domestic cares, or even by new affections; but it is not filled as it used to be, and all these new diversions have an undertone of sadness. In the same way, no man, however completely he may have freed himself from religious beliefs he once held dear, can wholly purge his soul of tenderness for his fallen idols.

Illuminating indeed is the analogy commonly established in this connection between religion and love. They are actually identical in that both idealise images and create idols. They are different in that the idols of love, which are sources of joy, or pleasure, or pain, are never endowed with a metaphysical or mythological significance (save as a *tour de force* by a few poets who put their Beatrices to work as symbols). The so-called "religion of love," which was one of the strangest products of the era of Romanticism, was not given

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that name from any intent to found a bona fide religion. Rather it seemed to offer a substitute—as it certainly afforded abundant self-expression—to men and women hopelessly bewildered by the loss of all religion (along with the ethical and practical ideals that go with religion), and unable to rise to a new vision of life or to accept the discipline of a more rigorous code of ethics. The “religion of love” was a counterfeit religion. It rapidly degenerated into morbid sentimentality, exasperated sensualism, and desperate debauchery.

However, the hedonistic (including the ethical) idols of myth-making and religion are all more or less crude interpretations of the universe; and the number and importance of the pure concepts they embrace under mythological forms are the measure of progress in religions and of the progressive approximation of religion to philosophy. But the union can never be perfectly consummated by any gradual process of blending. For that, a spiritual revolution is necessary; a revolution that cleanses the will of every selfish, eudæmonistic and materialistic residuum, and strips religious thoughts and images of all mythological and

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transcendental attributes. In this process, religion has to lose the charm of the exterior garb that once adorned it. It has to become *thought*. Not cold thought, as is often supposed, but clear thought, thought limpid and serene and the source of an unclouded joy.

XXVII

Perfection and Imperfection

“PERFECTION is not of this world,” saith the proverb; and it saith well, leaving to us meantime (as all proverbs do—and that is their imperfection!) the task of discovering its true meaning and the reason for it. In the first place, if perfection is not of this world, it certainly is not of any other—that is to say, it is an abstraction; and the abstract is the unreal, the radically, the irremediably unreal.

And why? Why should perfection be unreal?

The demand for perfection is addressed primarily and directly to our actions and urges us to see to it that they be, with reference to their intrinsic purposes, what they pretend to be: pure, unadulterated thought, if it is a case of thinking; pure imagination, if it is a case of art; acts of utility and skill, and nothing else, if these are directed to individual welfare; acts looking toward the universal good

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(and nothing else), if they are moral or ethical. And when we have this purity, this singleness of being, and only then, do we have "perfection."

But now this curious situation arises: a moral action is consummated only in so far as it restrains and masters impulses that look to the selfish interest of the individual; a practical action, only in so far as it reduces the multiplicity of desires to the unit of the useful; a thought or judgment, only in so far as it controls and sifts the images supplied by fancy; and imagination only in so far as it tranquillises in contemplation the turmoil of desires and practical strivings.

The demand for perfection, accordingly, if it be taken literally, would require that the victory in each of these spheres be so complete as to disable the competitor absolutely, deprive it of all aggressiveness and stifle the slightest protest of rebellion. But if this were to happen, the adversary would be beaten not in a given set of circumstances and in certain connections only, but for good and all. Not conquest merely, but death—destruction root and branch!

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And destruction of what? Destruction, in each particular sphere, of the special form of spiritual activity that is prerequisite to the activity of that sphere. For thought presupposes the image; the image an impulse of will; the utilitarian act, all those multiple perceptions which give rise, in turn, to multiple desires; the ethical act, the whole group of hedonistic motives. And so we might go on. Now all these things, in their discordant concord, make up the Spirit in its concrete unity; and therefore no one of them could be destroyed without destroying all the others and the Spirit as well! And this would be a manifest absurdity!

Any given form of spiritual activity, as it asserts itself, does so by gaining ascendancy over the other forms, encompassing them, limiting them, and forcing its own imprint upon them. But this preponderance is never so great that the vanquished do not counter-attack, leaving their mark, so to speak, on the body of the master as a retaliation for the moment and a promise of a turn of the tables at some other time.

Such marks are the *paucae maculae* to which

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we must be reconciled in Homer or in any other poet; for the artist would have his matter fully responsive and obedient, whereas it is rebellious to his impassioned travail. All writers confess to the scratches and bruises they have earned in wrestling with an untamable Beauty, who "writhes and twists and fights back," as Carducci said of his Muse. In the moral life, they are the backslidings, the waverings, the overdoings, the vain complacencies, the vulgar motives, which, in varying degree but always leaving their traces behind them, blemish every act of a human being, however admirable, however noble it may otherwise appear or be. In the economic life, they are the mistakes we make by yielding to desires that distract us from the goal we have set ourselves; or, to cite an extreme and negative example, the compromises that shrewd and unprincipled men make with moral ideals; for perfect unscrupulousness is never attained: some qualm, some twinge, of conscience is certain to disturb the hardest heart of Pharaoh, which, however cursed by Jehovah, never becomes a stone but remains a heart. In the sphere of thought, they are the obscurities, the

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misstatements, the hasty judgments, which are present in every work of science. The scholar does his best to avoid or correct them, and he brings his product closer and closer to the ideal, much as the artist polishes his poem or retouches his picture, or the moral man purifies and sublimates his virtue; but he never quite reaches the barrier, much less does he knock it down and trample it underfoot.

So we see how intrinsically impossible it is that one of our acts should be "perfect," in the sense of being perfectly pure; and it is doubly impossible therefore that any individual should be a "perfect man." In the first place, the individual is nothing, really, except the sequence of his acts, and these, as we have just observed, are all blemished with imperfections. In the second place, as an individual, he leans toward one or another of the spiritual forms (he is a poet, or a scientist, or a man of affairs, etc.); and every special or stressed capacity carries with it a correlative and special incapacity. The greater a man's proficiency in his own field, the less perfect he is as the "whole man." In fact, the best exemplars of the "compleat" man we are most likely to

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find among the mediocrities. The *magnum ingenium*, as the phrase runs, is never *sine mixtura dementiae*, is never without some monumental ineptitude; and the same truth we try to express in another apothegm: that “a man’s defects spring from his very virtues.”

What shall we do then? “Bathe our eyes in tears in this grievous pass”? It would be childish to do that; for we may not weep with propriety over something that is beyond laughter and wailing but stands as an essential prerequisite to both smiles and tears. Not only must we not lament, but we must be very, very careful to keep this Demon of Perfection from getting into us! As everybody knows, the worst devil of all is the one that wears an angel’s face!

In actual life we encounter the artist who is obsessed with “perfection,” who is ever pursuing the impeccable verse, the sculptured sentence, the picture that is quintessential art; and we set him down as a weak and impotent man who will never get anywhere. We meet the scientist who makes a god of absolute and meticulous accuracy, and we brush him aside as a hollow and futile pedant. We know men

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who set such store on cleverness that they finally hang themselves in the snare their miraculous ingenuity had set for Fortune. And here are scrupulous and conscientious people intent on cleansing microscopic blemishes from their polished souls and who go about in sack-cloth and ashes in atonement for any of their acts which are less than holy; and these we classify as hypocrites and egotists. People, in short, who profess to be developing harmoniously within themselves all the aptitudes of the human being from poetry to strategy, from philosophy to fox-trotting, from the philanthropist's tenderness of heart to the hero's fortitude in combat, we look upon as farceurs of low comedy. Artists of real power and ability, scientists who are making real conquests of the unknown, honest citizens and worth-while men who are spending their time usefully on this earth, are not wasting their energies over such trifles: they aspire to perfection but not in its absurdities; they fear imperfection, but not without common sense. They understand, though they have not always thought the matter out, that the important thing is to win their fight but not necessarily to clean up the

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battlefield, to master the adversary but not necessarily to kill him or shackle him forever, to exercise their particular form of spiritual activity upon the matter in hand, but not necessarily to suppress the other forms over which they have caused it to prevail. Their effort has been to assert themselves victoriously in their specific capacities; and this has meant sticking to essentials and not worrying about secondary or less important things. They are content with reaching the centre whence they can expand little by little toward the circumference, even if they never quite succeed in touching it at every one of its infinitude of points. Unlucky the man who does not feel the urge of perfection, which is the prompter of all action, of all action with a purpose, of all *perficere*, of all "doing through." But mad is the man who would base his whole on the impossible, on the full attainment of his ideal in every one of its details; for this would divert a useful and fertile capacity, a noble mission perhaps, into a sterile and despairing obsession, into a paralysis of life, into the imperfection of perfect perfection.

If a great poet cannot make his voice heard

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save after many stammerings and even with a few false notes, we know what our duty is: to accept those stammerings and those false notes without too much complaint. If a thinker cannot give us the light of a new truth except by veiling it in places with exaggerations and whimsicalities, let us not fail to see the light because of those few clouds. If a statesman cannot fulfil the mission committed to him by history without some wandering from the straight and narrow path, without some concession to personal vanity or personal interest, let us forgive those errors and overlook those weaknesses. For their part such men will do well never to accept their failures, much less condone them, so long as they are still at work; but we who set ourselves up as judges will do well by doing differently. And they, again, severe toward themselves as workers and creators, will have moments when they can step aside, and look at themselves as judges; and then they too must be indulgent toward themselves (an indulgence which will also be humility), and accept their imperfections.

All this may seem to be a contradiction, but

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it is simply a recognition that reality is movement, and our view is therefore no more incoherent than any movement. And it may seem to leave us in the dark as to the imperfections that are to be fought uncompromisingly and those that may be tolerated. But the necessary light we each find in ourselves case by case; just as a traveller on a march knows, case by case, when he can permit himself the "imperfection" of resting—unless he is to choose, by the sheer perfection of his marching ever onward, to lose the capacity for marching altogether.

And, for that matter, theory itself can give us the light required—a basis for distinguishing, that is; and those only fail to see it who start from a false conception of spiritual activity. If we think of a spiritual act as something mechanical, as a sum of little acts (much as geometricians think of a line as an infinite series of points), we are brought to consider perfection and imperfection as matters merely of more or of less. This in turn implies a qualitative parity of perfection and imperfection, and leads to the final conclusion that everything is perfect or imperfect according to

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momentary whim, that everything—beauty, morality, truth—is after all caprice and illusion.

However, a spiritual act is just the opposite of this: it is the indivisible, and not the divisible, the continuous and not the discontinuous, the thrust upwards towards the heights and not weighable or measurable mass. That is why we say that a work of art either is or is not, that it is alive or that it is dead—no halfway terms being possible. And a thought is either fundamentally true or fundamentally false; and an action is either born of a love of the good, and therefore intrinsically moral; or born of practical calculation and therefore intrinsically selfish.

The imperfection that we may tolerate and to which we may properly be resigned, is the imperfection that clings to the existing virtue and not the imperfection born of a non-existing thing that would pretend to be a real thing. The endurable disease, *vita ipsa morbus*, is the one which permits an organism to live, think, and act, and not the one which does not even need to be tolerated since it kills the organism out of hand. Acceptable imperfec-

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tion, in a word, is the living thing that hampers and perhaps here and there disfigures another living thing: it is the overflowing imagination that here and there disturbs sober, dispassionate thought (without however damaging the vital kernel of the thought); it is human frailty—the complex of individual interests—that are seen to lurk about the outer limits of a noble action, but never dare invade its inner heart; it is the love of comfort, the urgency of practical needs, that prevent the artist from bringing his work to perfection *ad unguem* and allow it to leave his hands with a rough spot here and there, here and there a line unpolished, here and there an error he has not been able to avoid. Such imperfections we may overlook; but not the other kind, not the imperfections that are intrinsic and capital. As Hebbel said of poetic composition, and as we may repeat, in general, for every creation or actuality of the spirit: “We can be sparing of everything, except of the fundamental motive.”

XXVIII

Innocence and Knowledge

INNOCENCE is no longer honoured as an ideal condition of life, and even the poets have ceased to glorify it:

Blessed Golden Age of primal innocence
When virtue was not fell to man's pleasaunce!

For when the idyll is essayed in poetry nowadays, it is not the "innocent" affair it used to be.

And in fact what is innocence, after all? Innocence means inexperience of evil, in one's self and consequently in others; and since evil exists in ourselves and in others, since evil is present in all things, innocence is another word for ignorance. It implies inability to understand ourselves, others, the world. It implies incomprehension of the imagery produced by art and of the concepts evolved by science—for both art and science relate to experience of

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life, and if life is good life is also evil. We may, to be sure, yearn for an unspotted innocence; but in the way one yearns for peace and Paradise (for non-being, that is). Quite properly we may try to protect the "innocence" of children and young people, but only to prevent them from acquiring too early experience of emotions they have not yet learned to master (just as we do not begin their mathematics with infinitesimal calculus, and their first experiments in thought with the doctrine of categories). All of us may look back wistfully to the beautiful days when we knew nothing of the world. But those days we had to leave behind us. Often it was our parents and our teachers who rent the veil asunder: "You are not a boy any longer, and you can now be told. . . ."

So why set so much store on innocence? At the best, it is an unavoidable defect, an elementary stage of evolution, comparable to the lisping that precedes talking, and to the toppling and tumbling that prepare for the child's first steps. And why, conversely, all the reproachfulness, suspicion, and depreciation for the opposite of innocence, for that sophistica-

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tion, or astuteness, or “knowledge,” which is the mother of Wisdom, and which we call “malice” in the Latin tongues; though the word with us has no connotation of wickedness, much less of cruelty, and indicates in him who possesses it simply a keen and clear perception of evil that may very well attend an irreproachable will to do and to promote the good. Such “knowledge” is the one thing which permits us to sound the nethermost depths and penetrate the most secret nooks of human passions and human crimes—whence our understanding of tragedy and romance; and to unmask all the petty motives and trivial weaknesses that furnish the sparkle of comedy. “Knowledge” is our guide through the tangle-wood of history with all its snarls and snares and complexities; and as it teaches us to be shrewd and wary in dealing with human events, so it clears our own view of ourselves, dispelling our illusions, laying bare the unconfessable motives we would hide even from our own consciences. Whatever the sorrows that result, whatever the struggles that may be involved, it is the part of a man always to pluck the bitter apple from the Tree of Good and

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Evil, and prefer to the innocence that is sotishness the “knowledge” that is intelligence.

So runs one of those arguments that may be taken as typical of a kind of false reasoning which affirms things that are all true but goes wrong by pretending to answer a question that is different from the question asked. In such arguments, as we commonly observe, words are used in senses that diverge slightly from normal usage, so that the reasoning silences without convincing. Though we can find nothing to controvert, we feel somehow that the problem on which light was sought has not been solved: the conclusion is logically unsatisfiable, and the mind is baffled; but our consciences cannot quite be brought to admit that the false answer is the true answer, that the non-existent exists, that the unsound is sound.

In the present case, the fundamental trouble is that “innocence” does not stand to the “knowledge” that is sophistication as ignorance stands to the knowledge that is information or experience. The “innocent” or “ingenuous” person is not a sot, as compared with the astute or shrewd person, presumably intelligent; he is intelligent in a sense in which the other is

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obtuse, or obtuse in a sense in which the other is intelligent. We are thus brought to compare two different intelligences and two different stupidities, and to prefer the intelligence and the stupidity of innocence to the intelligence and stupidity of astuteness.

If the individual man could realise omniscience and omniversality in his own finite being, there would be no occasion for settling a question like the one raised here. But individuality implies specialisation, specification, limitation—a narrowing of scope which gives individuation its power and its efficiency. That is why each of us is faced with the need of deciding whether it is more urgent, more important, more useful, to know and to see the good that is in men, or to know and to see the baseness and meanness of their motives. Or, to state the situation negatively, we must decide which is the more tolerable: blindness to the good or blindness to evil. The point is this: if the cynic has an eagle eye for evil, he is likely to need spectacles to see anything good; and if he is always sceptical where good is concerned, he is over-credulous where evil is concerned. Almost every day of our lives

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we meet people so mercilessly critical of others that they cannot see a virtue as radiant as the sun—people who insist on translating into terms of evil the untranslatable poetry of holiness. Our own age is fertile in great artists who display wondrous acuteness and finesse in delineating morbid psychological processes. But ask them to portray plain everyday goodness or simple heroism, and they at once become mawkishly sentimental or trivially rhetorical. On the other hand, we have all had the good fortune to know men of robust intellect and upright character, as revealed in distinguished achievement, who never could be brought by fair means or foul to understand certain vulgar and wretched motives in people who were bound in the end to trick them; and such men we have admired in their sublime childishness—in that obtuseness which was the guarantee of their delicacy of sentiment, that gullibility which was the mainstay of their best manhood.

On this basis the conduct of parents and teachers toward children becomes clearer, along with our homesickness for our “age of innocence,” when, as we say, the world looked

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rosier to us, purer, better, more beautiful, than it is now. Nor is the latter an empty sentimentality. It is, rather, a harking back to the first and truer vision that opened before our minds, a vision that has been involved and complicated and deepened with the years but which must ever triumph in the end over other concepts of life that may seem wiser on the surface but will prove less sound underneath. Of course, individuality is universality as well as limitation: innocence and knowledge are stresses and not absolutes. The cynic is never without some experience of the good, nor is the naïve simpleton wholly blind to artful manœuvres—the goose has at least a trace of the fox's slyness. Whence that solemn "entrance upon life," prefaced by ritualistic words, which parents of all races and nations hold in store for their children. Hence also the duty incumbent upon all of us to develop such awareness of evil as is indispensable for performing the work we have undertaken. If temperament prevents us from making such compromises, we should withdraw; not because innocence is not a desirable quality, but because it is not an excuse for incompetence. To make a point

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of ingenuousness is a silly thing, as it is silly also to expect that reality will adapt itself to individual illusion. There are people, for instance, who are forever protesting their disgust at the vileness they have to associate with in political life, at the selfish interests that press upon them from every side. This self-seeking they cannot eradicate; in fact, they must conciliate it to a certain extent or wink at its conciliation. What they are really trying to do is transform, I will not say a chain-gang of convicts, but just an army of politicians into a congregation of spotless souls. The best advice we can give them is that they should retire from politics. If you shiver when you see a corpse, don't become an undertaker—laudable and necessary as his profession may be. Society, with all the instrumentalities at its disposal, tries to put men into positions where they fit. Wisely it refrains from entrusting to sky-soaring philosophers or ingenuous heroes such portions of its work as require shallower intellects and less noble hearts but an acuter awareness of the frailties of men. Life, in its own processes of failure and success, tends to set thief against thief, rascal

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against rascal, that they may read in the depths of each other's souls, fight each other, offset each other, and thus get through with a lot of necessary business that otherwise would never be done in the world.

XXIX

The Value of Example

THE efficacy of “example” has also on occasion been called in question. Either—so the argument runs—either the moral potency exists in a person—in which case it does its work without requiring extraneous encouragement; or else it does not—in which case no amount of stimulus from without can bring it into being.

And the argument cannot be answered by adducing instances to any number in which example has been effective; for it indicts as contradictory the very notion of “example,” and any cases that might be cited would presuppose the validity of the concept denied. The concept therefore must be examined, the inner fibre of the argument itself tested, to find (as we shall find) that what seemed to be its strength is really its weakness.

It is a strength or a weakness which resides in the assumption that the mind, or, as I say,

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the Spirit, of the individual is one thing, and the example another thing independent of the mind; and that the moral potency is a property, or attribute, of the individual—that is to say, a fact, which either is or is not. In point of fact, the moral potency, like every potency of the Spirit, is not a property of the individual, since the individuality itself is a particular and transitory manifestation of that potency; and what is called “example” is (or has been) another particular manifestation of the same potency. The result is that the alleged extraneousness of one to the other does not obtain.

When, indeed, and how, do we feel the influence of example? Not in the stage of volition where action is already in progress, wholly intent on itself, concerned wholly with itself; but in the stage more especially thought of as the stage of preparation, where action is at war with the remissness which would cause it to falter; or else at intervals of interruption in action, when temptation presents itself in its most insinuating garb; or during moments of fatigue, when we offer least resistance to the adversary. And at such times the moral

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potency, chilled with the shadow of doubt which brings mistrust and discouragement, is revived by the power of examples (family or national traditions, lives of good men, and of heroes of every age and place), by the consciousness, that is, of what human fortitude has accomplished in different cases or in similar cases, and of what it may do again, and perhaps do better, in the case at hand. Example, in other words, is not something apart from the moral potency of the individual and independent of it: it is that very potency in its concrete reality, as it has manifested itself in times past and is still operating in the present. Example, to use a figure of speech, marks the degree of intensity or altitude that virtue has once attained; and we must assume that it has lost none of its power; for even if variations up to the heights or down to zero appear in individuals empirically conceived, the moral and spiritual potency, which is naught else than reality itself, never fails.

Support for this view of the nature and function of example may be detected in the fact that "example" is invariably an assertion of history. Unless this be so, the example

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seems to be smitten with a sort of impotence and loses all its effect on us—a truth even popularly recognised: “That’s the way people act on the stage and in story-books,” we say of certain fallacious proposals or theories of conduct. It is of no moment that at times certain episodes have been effective as examples and later on proved false or legendary by historical criticism. For the minds which felt their influence they were fact and not fancy. Furthermore, in view of the concept of example expounded above, it is evident that no generic recognition of morality and of the claims of morality is sufficient support for a faltering will; for the wavering bears not upon morality in general but upon the extent to which morality is practicable in a definite, specific case. The examples to which the mind reverts are chosen from spheres more or less kindred in quality to the problem in question—civic or military valour, let us say, resistance to carnal appetites, fortitude under persecution, and so on, according to times, locations, professions, and other circumstances. It is curious, but also understandable, why an individual never avails himself of examples

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from his past life. His memories of himself remind him of what he was once but may be no longer; they do not emphasise the omnipresent power of all humanity. Besides, no one knows better than he that the good things he may have done were mixed with all sorts of selfishness and weakness; and nothing from his past stands before his eyes with such purity and perfection as to compel his own admiration and approval.

The tendency to underrate the influence of example and to overlook the weakness of the argument analysed above is furthered by the fact that many so-called "examples" are put forward, which lack the conditions we must regard as essential to true examples. Naturally we stand unmoved before a paradigm of virtue displayed in front of our eyes with many frills of imagination but little warmth of heart. If anything we are inclined to poke fun at it; because we are not convinced that things were really as represented; and the thicker the virtue is laid on, the more we suspect its historical verity. Then again we may shed tears of burning pathos over some narrative of heroism and experience no moral ef-

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fects from it at all, since we at once feel emotions and do things just the contrary to the "example" we have had before us. In such cases, the contemplative or æsthetic interest has been overstressed to the disadvantage of the moral. For a similar reason we need not be surprised that the most delicate power of discrimination between good and evil, the most infallible surety of judgment on the moral quality of certain acts, may nevertheless allow an individual to "follow the worse"; for here the intellectual interest is aroused, as was the æsthetic in the case preceding, out of all proportion to the moral. One of the commonest disappointments we meet in life is to have credited goodness of heart and nobility of disposition to people who show exquisite sensibility and keen intelligence, but prove to be hard and harsh and fundamentally vicious when put to the test. What we should have noticed was not their readiness of sympathy for pitiable cases related to them, nor the accuracy of their judgment on situations passing under their scrutiny; but their behaviour in circumstances where some sacrifice, little or big, was called for on their part.

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Conversely, a muddled moral vision, a tendency to think badly on moral issues and call evil good and good evil, throw no light whatever on the moral fibre of a man; for in practice he may belie all his false views, or at the most, reconcile his good conduct with his bad principles by a series of sentimental quibbles: "bad head, heart of gold," runs an Italian phrase. In the same way, a man's fancy may affect all sorts of lubricous imagery and he may enjoy obscenity in art and still confine his lewdness strictly to the æsthetic field: *lasciva pagina, vita proba*. Fortunately rhetoric is quite powerless whether for good or for evil; or, if you wish, it is harmful in both cases only as rhetoric, as a futile thing that wastes time. And likewise, if one's past actions are ineffectual for good example, so they are for bad, since at the moment of decision it is a question not of what the individual has been but of what he is going to be. The generic recognition of evil as a necessary aspect of the universe is without influence because that recognition is no guarantee of the amount of resistance that evil may offer in a specific case: at the most it avers that if evil

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exists, the good is forever present also, forever confronting evil, and forever victorious over it.

But all evil acts have a pernicious force as bad examples; they all offend, they all “scandalise,” in the sense of the Gospel, giving rise not to repugnance (in which case they would be, as they actually are, useful) but to temptations, weakening our confidence as we manfully labour and struggle, inclining us to low compromises and ignoble apathy. Parents and teachers, therefore, bear a grave responsibility. The children in their keeping are all prone to measure moral values by the ideals exemplified in those who to their eyes represent authority; and they will probably improve on those examples not in the direction of the virtues, which require effort and severe discipline, but toward the anti-ideals that offer ease and pleasure. Rightly do we fear the “influence of environment,” which more commonly means the bad example set by citizens but especially by those appointed to lead. It is a subtly corruptive force that gradually but inevitably undermines the integrity of every individual.

The man of moral discernment will there-

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fore not only reprove the evil he has done but he will also lament the consequences which his act will have as it is disjoined from him and continues to operate as a bad example; and its action will be all the more widespread and influential in proportion as he has been respected and as his fame is likely to endure. In view of this, one might amplify the precept of charity which exhorts us to hate sin but not the sinner: we should be lavish in our praise of good deeds, but sparing in our praise of those who do them, glorifying heroic accomplishments but not making idols or gods of their authors. The greatest men have their weak points which serve as bad examples. The Father of the Gods himself inspired one of the characters of Terence to ease his conscience in every case of delinquency by remarking: "If Jupiter did that, *ego homuncio hoc non facerem?*"

XXX

The House Divided Against Itself

IN many of the varied pictures which have come on to us from nineteenth-century poetry, we find a state of mind described by the word “doubling” (division into two); and this word was so frequently used in popular books of days gone by that it has entered our common language in Italy, where we all, on occasion, speak of the “doubling of consciousness.”

But to grasp this notion clearly, we must not confuse it, as it is often confused, with what might be called “normal division,” or “consciousness of consciousness.” It need not be said that a person is continually re-presenting his impulses and actions to his own mind, visualising, analysing, criticising them: he is continually dividing his consciousness into two parts, one of which is actor, the other spectator. But the “doubling” here is only apparent: what is seemingly a division is nothing but unity itself. Unity of consciousness can-

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not be a static thing. It embraces the whole process of unification; and this process necessarily involves the synthesising of antitheses: that is to say—the division in consciousness is affirmed only in so far as it is negated and transcended in the unity of consciousness. The analysis and criticism of action is the very process of new action—a process that has three stages: image—intuition; thought—concept; decision—action, will. The psychological type in which this process is most conspicuous is the careful, cautious, scrupulous, conscientious man.

To state the situation in a word: variance between thought and will (where, that is, we think one thing and do another) does not constitute a real case of “doubling.” (It may do so, perhaps, in one set of circumstances: where thought is mere frivolity, a chaotic mixture of thoughts and impressions, a jumble of words—non-thought). Where there is such variance we seem to think well but to do badly. And the reason is, that along with our apparent thought we are thinking a real thought which bridges the gap between itself and action, whereas the former remains cut off from

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action. Whenever we really *think* one of our own states of mind (or even a historical situation), when we really *think* it *through*, we are—so far, at least, as the thought is vivid and really present before our minds—led on to a volition and to an action corresponding exactly to the thought. There can be no variance; and if there seems to be, it is a sign that the thought we had has been replaced by another thought, or by non-thought. The psychological type illustrating this case is not the man of so-called “doubled” or “divided” consciousness, but the ordinary muddled-head, who fails to think straight and to see clearly and acts more or less at random.

True “doubling,” the phenomenon of such great interest to the poets above referred to, appears, rather, in the sphere of volition; and it may assume different forms, some of which are easily mistaken for one or another of the preceding. There is the case, for instance, where we do wrong, feeling intermittently or all the while that we are doing wrong; but, despite this chiding of conscience, we continue—staggering, it may be, but persistent—along the wrong path. The “doubling” here is really

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weakness of will. It is analysis and not synthesis. The forces that are clashing one against the other seem to be mighty ones. But they are actually weaklings. No one of them is strong enough to get the better of the others and to create that unity of will which alone is power. A moral impulse finds itself confronted by one or more selfish impulses. It does not vanquish them, nor yet is it driven from the field itself.

There is also the inverse case, which requires the same comment. Here we are doing what is right; but we feel that what is right is not worth doing. Acquiescence in the law of reality, obedience to the mandates of our best selves, seem to us cowardice, laziness, convenience, habit, stupidity, folly. Our nobler tendencies, derived from training or tradition, impel us, successfully impel us, in the right direction. But we take no joy in our virtue—it does not satisfy all our cravings; it is not harmonious with all the aspects of our volition.

That this is the nature of true “doubling” and as such a state of feeble volition, becomes strikingly evident from a third case belonging to the sphere of purely selfish will. The char-

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acter most fondly pictured in the literature I have mentioned is a passionate individual who at the same time seems to be untouched by desire. Enthusiastic, he is also indifferent. Sanguine, he is also cold. A libertine, he is bored, blasé—he never enjoys.

In some respects, though only in some respects, this figure is foreshadowed in Shakespeare's Hamlet; but on the whole it is a creation of modern life and reflects the laboured formation of a new religious consciousness which has given to recent and contemporary civilisation many moments such as Jesus lived in the Garden of Gethsemane. Reproduced in numberless and often mannerised imitations, its authentic originals are to be found in Chateaubriand and in Benjamin Constant. The latter experienced and described sentiments like this: "I rage! I am blind with fury! But after all, I don't care a hang!" Leopardi called this state of mind "ennui," "tedium," *noia*; and not only did he sing it as a great poet but he analysed it with the keenness of a trained psychologist and the understanding of a profound historian.

And who of us has not felt the presence of

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this enemy within himself? Any merit we may claim resides not in our never having harboured such a visitor but in having triumphed over him; in having refused to accept the guest as proof of our aristocratic sophification; in having had the courage to shout in his very face his very name—which is “impotence”: impotence in living and impotence in manhood.

XXXI

✓ Specialisation and Intolerance

EVERY specialisation, it is said, has its own peculiar narrow-mindedness, whereby it repudiates or repels other specialisations. Let us consider these in their four fundamental varieties represented by the outstanding figures of poet, philosopher, statesman, and saint. To one or another of these types, in their full breadth and complexity, all forms of human action are ultimately reducible.

We see, in fact, that the poet is continually abhorring the business man and politician, ridiculing the abstractions of the philosopher, pitying the self-abnegation of the saint. If he exalts any or all of these in his poetry from time to time, he does so because they are in his poetry and because he admires the imagery they suggest to his artistic mind. He has no love for them in themselves. He does not imitate them in real life, nor seek the things they

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stand for. And in this lies the eccentricity, the queerness, of the poet.

The practical man, the man of business or of public affairs, thinks of the poet as a ninny, of the philosopher as a time-waster, of the saint as a simpleton and an incompetent (the “unarmed prophet”). And this is the vulgarity of the “bourgeois.”

And even the saint, kind soul that he is, is dubious of the sense-tickling imagery of poetry, scornful of the futile “reason” of the philosophies, sorrowful at the worldliness of those who scramble for things of the flesh on this speck of earth lost in eternity. And this, to use epithets of Giordano Bruno, is the holy asininity, the reverend stupidity, of the mystic.

But has not the philosopher his weak point too? Certainly: for he thinks other men are dupes, while he is wise, that others are blind to things that he can see. Foolish and blind the poet as he goes singing his nonsense in verse; foolish and blind the man of affairs who sets his heart on contingent things; foolish and blind the saint, forever chasing the wild goose of spiritual perfection. The philosopher is a philosopher. He sees the error they

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each are making, the game they each are playing, taking themselves seriously all the while. So from the everlasting tumult he withdraws into the eternal silences. From the ocean of illusion, storm-swept by winds of fatuity, he draws up his bark on the dry strands of Truth, "looks out upon earth and sky and sea, and smiles."

We must not be too severe toward these mutual intolerances. When they are not poses or affectations, when they are spontaneous, naïve, childish, so to speak, they are the up-flaring, the overboiling, of these various special activities in their creative effort. They are exaggerations, and hence guarantees, of virtues which are profitably attending to their respective and peculiar achievements. And we are not very severe, in fact. We do not blame the poet for his philosophical blasphemies, provided he gives us poetry that is living and beautiful. We overlook the bad taste of the man of affairs, if he keeps his country prosperous. And the saint can deprecate worldliness and reason all he wishes, if he refreshes our faith in goodness by the example of a pure life.

Specialisation and Intolerance

But this reciprocal intolerance is reciprocal ignorance, nevertheless; and it is sustained on reciprocal prejudices. Indulgence is all it deserves from us, not approbation or praise—another way of saying that the intolerance in question is not an absolute necessity but may be overcome. And overcome it is (or at least moderated) in cases less extreme than those just described. In words, if not in full sincerity, the business man may pay homage to art, philosophy, and humility. The poet may have the good sense to recognise that there are other things to do in this life aside from art. The saint may come to understand that the world is not to be renounced, but to be improved and perfected. The philosopher may perceive that the dry land on which he has found refuge shifts as the sea shifts, if indeed more slowly, that it is washed by the sea and perhaps made by the sea.

And what are such acknowledgments on the part of poet, business man, and saint? They are flashes of philosophy bursting before the minds of these men who are not only specialists but also whole men; and these gleams of philosophy reveal to them the unity of which

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they are part and function, refuting and breaking down the prejudices born of the passionate intensity of their special endeavour. And in the philosopher? They are a broader, ampler, more complete philosophy with which he finds the weak point in the prejudices of others as well as in the prejudices of his own special form of mind. He too sees that his work is part and function of the unity of the Spirit, that it could exist only as a phase of the Spirit, an eternal phase in a succession of phases, ever being born of those before it, ever dissolving into those that follow—one thinks of the swimmer lifting his head to survey the expanse of the water about him, but then pillowing it on the waves again to stroke his way forward with renewed vigour. This is the supreme glory of philosophy, the greatest of the triumphs it wins: that destroying all transcendencies, it also destroys the transcendence of philosophy itself. It prevents idol-breaking from becoming an idol—belief, that is, in a mythical form of Spirit higher than all other forms which lifts man to an empyrean whence he could never get back to earth again.

XXXII

✓ Indifference to Public Affairs

THERE are few things in the world more tiresome than the talk which is heard, has always been heard, and will always be heard, about “the dreadful way the government is being run”; criticisms of the negligence, laziness, deceit, cheating, thievery, and incompetence of public officials, leading to the conclusion that things are going very badly indeed, that the country is headed straight for the damnation bow-wows.

“Facile criticism” is the name we well apply to such censure. If it is so perpetually recurring and so perpetually enduring, the reason is to be found in the premise which underlies it: the presupposition of a “perfect administration,” where everybody does his duty with perfect intelligence and perfect scrupulousness. And this, as we shall see, is a wholly abstract conception, which, being such, can never be verified in reality.

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In reality, the State is a continuous assertion of “archy” over “anarchy,” a continuous struggle between forces of dissolution and forces of integration. Of these latter, the former are an immediate and spontaneous manifestation of the vital impulses of a nation; and to suppress them to the point of destroying the sources from which they spring would be to destroy all the rest: without them, in fact, the State would never be created.

What, after all, are these “forces of dissolution” which fill good citizens (rightfully so, from certain points of view) now with terror and now with loathing? They are individuals following their natural inclinations, eager to love, eager to help themselves, their children, their friends, eager to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh and of the mind—eager to live their lives, in short. Oftentimes if we stop for a close look at the public men who are being so severely censured, we are seized with a feeling of sympathy, of indulgence, at least of compassion, and our wrath somehow subsides. We begin to ask for less perfection, and to expect less perfection, thankful that things are

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going as well as possible or even that they are no worse than they are.

This is no excuse for a “laissez-faire” attitude towards politics—the refuge of the inept and the cynical, who, like the last of the Medici in Tuscany, shrug their shoulders and say that “the world takes care of itself.” Statesmen who adopt this policy, prepare the ground, in the very best case, for that violent treatment which a State gives to its own diseases by virtue of the forces lying deep in its organism—for revolution; and, in the worst case, they ruin or destroy the State and the nation which it was their duty to rule and to guide. Rather than “*laisser faire*,” the duty incumbent upon us is to assume an attitude that will be not impatient, but firm and assertive.

Politicians themselves do not suffer so very much from the evils they see before and around them, evils which they must deflect and divert, which they must deal with and control. These evils are, so to speak, the material with which they work, and the emotions they feel as normal men find an outlet in their daily action. It is much the case of the artist, who is not

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dismayed at the difficulties thrown in his way by the rebellious materials offered to his hand, but rather welcomes them as challenges to his skill, and takes keen enjoyment in the triumph he gradually wins over them, incomplete though the victory must ever be. The people who suffer most from the way the world has a habit of going, the people who are downcast at the irregularities, absurdities, injustices they see on every side, are not politicians or statesmen, but poetic or meditative spectators of events (along with men of duty, of justice, of sacrifice, who are good souls devoted to the good).

Particularly acute is the agony such people suffer at viciousness or mismanagement in public affairs; for the State, in the aspect here considered, is an ethical institution, the greatest of all ethical institutions, even, one might say, the sum of them all. That is why violations of duty and justice made in the name of the State are as offensive as crimes committed by people who pose as honest men and are so esteemed in public opinion. They somehow shake our confidence in the reality and possibility of the good.

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With a view to the public welfare, we are asked, for example, to succour the poor, the humble, the unfortunate. We are asked to create public offices, to appropriate public moneys, and to elect public servants to manage these. Then we discover that we have been imposed upon. Concern for the public welfare was only a mask. All this public charity was organised and executed only to give profit and luxury to a few rascals. Such masks can be seen in so many departments of public administration that we begin to doubt whether government is anything but mask, falsehood, oppression, made a little more odious, perhaps, because of the rank hypocrisy conjoined with them. So individuals and political parties protest. They tear off this mask and that mask, and take the government over themselves; and at once political corruption to the advantage of individuals is increased, or at least the graft enjoyed by one group is now passed along to another, and things proceed as they did before, perhaps a little worse than they did before. "All parties are alike." "We were better off when we were worse off." Such are the numberless phrases that political

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reform inspires. And people are disgusted. They see that things are wrong. They perceive the damage that is being done. But they cannot repair the damage nor right the wrong. The torment they feel, whether as contemplative spirits or as virtuous souls, is the torment of impotence. Better not to worry, therefore! Better to forget politics, look the other way, withdraw into one's own pursuits, keep to the narrow circle of one's own friends, acquaintances, relatives!

Times past and present show us many cases of such attitudes (with a behaviour corresponding) of indifference to public affairs. But times past and present also show that the motive of moral indignation originally at the bottom of the attitude and the conduct soon changes, and necessarily changes, to a selfish one. People who manifest their moral disdain, their ethical nausea in this way, eventually find themselves members of that numerous but not very honourable company recruited from the world's self-seekers, who turn their backs on the interests of their fellow-men to devote themselves exclusively to their own welfare.

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In our own day we have the æsthetes and the aristocrats who regard politics and war as matters for the boors and bumpkins to attend to as they please—affairs for drunken slaves, as an ancient Roman might have put it; while they themselves stand apart in a presumed superiority, smiling contemptuously at the vulgar scramblings of the mob which quarrels and even lets its throat be cut over pieces of territory, protective tariffs, the form or name a State shall have. As though anything important were involved in such questions, as though a man should give up the pleasure he takes in himself and his own concerns for the sake of helping to answer them!

In centuries gone by, it was the “sages” who drew aside from the lives of their peoples to devote themselves to the pursuit of wisdom, content so long as they were left alone in a seclusion favourable to their meditations, ready to accept any peace so long as it was peace, and any despot so long as he could guarantee the leisure they desired.

We know the kind of men produced by the monasteries and ecclesiastical benefices of a later time when monks and clerics shook the

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weight of the world from their shoulders—those, I mean, who really renounced life; for the “valent” ones, as Thomas Campanella called them, renounced that renunciation and the pleasures of ignoring a struggling world. And the figures of this kind which we see, whether in the past or in the present, are such that no one would dare accord them admiration or veneration. They had their excuse, of course, and perhaps the illusion they cherished was sincere. They promoted, so they pretended, the contemplative life, cultivating the arts and the sciences, doing good to a suffering humanity with works of piety and mercy. But we know that the excuse was not valid. Art and science languish once we cut the vibrant ties that bind them to life. They become vapid, academic, trivial. Charity and loving-kindness themselves degenerate to such meaningless forms that they humiliate and debase instead of comforting the needy and lifting them to their feet. Alms and bread-lines never give true and solid and enduring help. This must come from political changes in the conditions of social life, which give men a

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freer air to breathe and more opportunity for productive labour. In support of these assertions I need hardly trouble to cite examples. The history of my own country is full of them, especially in certain centuries which furnish startling ones.

Indifference toward public affairs presents, accordingly, a curious anomaly: it seems utterly despicable in practice, and yet solidly motivated in logic. The reason for this is that it is the perversion of a sound principle—the principle of specification, that is to say, of specialisation. Specialisation involves limitation. We have to refrain from doing many things we would like to do, but ought not to do; since to do them would mean neglecting our own peculiar work to handle the work of others badly or imperfectly. That is why we should control our tempers in judging the work of others, be careful not to lose our heads over things remote from our experience, avoid fighting battles in our imaginations and writhing in agony in reality; all the more since the notions we conceive and the opinions we utter in such frames of mind are for the most part

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exaggerated, and unjust as well as bootless; just as our hopes and fears are also for the most part without foundation.

If we exercise such due restraint upon ourselves, the feeling that becomes uppermost in our minds is not one of superiority but one of humility, or at least of modesty; and the renunciation we make by virtue of it is not contemptuous but rational, based as it now is on a sane concept of fitness and of duty. So it is not renunciation in the sense of complete withdrawal, complete detachment from public concerns. Rather we arrive and stop at a definite point in a definite sphere—the point marked by the limit of our special competence in the sphere of our special activities. And this sphere is “public” in that it is part of that universal in which all other spheres of activity unite, vibrate, resound, and from which vibrations and echoes descend into each separate sphere.

A citizen becomes a poet, or a philosopher or a saint, without however ceasing to be a citizen. On the contrary, the deeper he goes into one of these forms of being, the more strictly he adheres to that form, the better and

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truer he becomes as a citizen. The poet gives his people their dreams of the human heart. The philosopher sets before them the truths of Nature and the outlines of history. The saint cultivates and imparts the moral virtues. And all these creative forces make their influence felt in the field that is more specifically political.

It may happen on occasion that poet, philosopher, or saint becomes statesman or soldier—a political personality, that is, in the narrow sense of the term. Not a few such re-orientations or changes of rôle might be counted in the past, though the men who made them were not in the highest rank of their particular vocations; and they had their public careers either before their special callings developed or after these had passed their full maturity and were wearing out. The ideal of the Italian Romanticists and patriots of our Independence days was that the poet should “fall singing in battle”; and in some men the ideal was realised.

However, the exception does not make the rule; and the rule is not multiplication, but specialisation, of aptitudes—a rule established

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in the course of history because it has proved valuable to humanity. To secure the union of politics with the other forms of human activity we do not have to depend on rare prodigies and geniuses. That union is already a fact when we do the work for which we are fitted in the best and noblest way, and with a sense of responsibility and of service to our fellows.

XXXIII

Political Honesty

ANOTHER manifestation of the general failure to comprehend the true nature of politics is the persistent and ill-humoured demand that is made for “honesty” in public life.

An ideal sings in the souls of all the poor in spirit, and finds expression in the unmusical prose of their diatribes, their oratory, and their utopias. They dream of a sort of areopagus, made up of honest men, to whom alone should be entrusted the affairs of State or nation. In this congress we should find chemists, and physicians, and poets, and mathematicians, and doctors, and just plain ordinary citizens, all, however, endowed with two qualities: nobility of intentions along with personal unselfishness; and training or ability in some branch of human activity not directly connected with politics proper. Politics, in the good sense of the term, should result rather

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from this cross-breeding of honesty with so-called “technical competence.”

Just what kind of politics would be produced by this assortment of virtuous technicians there is, fortunately, no way of testing by experiment. History has never tried to realise this particular ideal, and seems to be in no great hurry to do so. It is true that every now and then—episodically, so to speak—groups more or less distantly resembling such elect company find themselves possessed of political power for short periods of time. Men loved and revered for their spotless probity and for their intellect and learning, are occasionally made heads of States. But they are at once put out of office again, with a doctorate in ineptitude added to their other titles. I need refer, in illustration, only to the Trinity, as it was dubbed, of “honest men” who made such botches in their respective countries, of the liberal revolutions of the first half of the nineteenth century: Lafayette in France, Espartero in Spain, and Guglielmo Pepe in the kingdom of Naples.

It is strange—though not so strange when we consider it in the light of the psychological

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explanations suggested above—that people should think in these terms in connection with politics only. When we are sick, when we must submit to a surgical operation, we never dream of hunting up an “honest man,” or even an honest philosopher or mathematician. What we ask for and do our best to find is a doctor or a surgeon, and we will take him honest or dishonest as he happens to be, provided he is a competent physician with a discerning clinical eye and a surgical hand that does not falter. But in politics we demand not politicians, by which I mean experts in statesmanship, but honest men, trained, if they are trained, in something besides politics.

“But what is political honesty then?” it may be asked. Political honesty is nothing but political capacity; just as the honesty of the physician and the surgeon is their capacity as physician or surgeon, which prevents them from murdering their patients with a fatuity compounded of good intentions and impressive erudition in other fields.

“And is that all? Should not the public official be a man above reproach in every respect, wholly worthy of esteem? Can public

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affairs be left to persons not in themselves commendable?" The answer is that the shortcomings a statesman of competence or genius may have in spheres other than politics make him unavailable in those spheres but not in politics. In the rest of his life we are free to condemn him and treat him as an ignorant professor, an unfaithful husband, a bad father, a corrupt libertine, or anything else. In the same way we may censure a spendthrift, dissolute or immoral poet as a gambler, a rake, and an adulterer; but we must accept his poetry for what it is as poetry: the pure part of his soul, the aspect of his life with which he progressively redeems himself. After Charles James Fox, a roisterer and roué of the first order, had come into prominence as orator and leader in Parliament, he is said to have tried to set his private life in order, forsaking disreputable places of amusement in an effort to become a respectable gentleman. Straightway he felt his inspiration as a speaker fail him. He lost his zest for the political fray. And he recovered his normal efficiency only when he had gone back to his habitual manner of living. Well, what of it? The most we might

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do is to deplore an unfortunate physical and psychological constitution in a man that makes him feel the need of unusual excitements and indulgences in order to do his best work. But this would have no bearing on Fox's achievement as a statesman; and as he was a valuable public servant, England did well in giving him plenty of room in politics; though prudent parents could not be blamed if they kept their daughters out of his way.

“But that isn't the only thing,” the objection further runs. “If we may ignore the private life of a statesman, how about actual dishonesty? This strikes at the roots of the very service he renders, and makes him a traitor to party or country. That is why we demand that he be privately, which means integrally, honest.” However, we must not overlook the fact that a man blessed with genius or real capacity will take liberties with everything but not with what constitutes his passion, his love, his glory, the fundamental justification and purpose of his being. The poet will be careless of his manners or his morals; but if he is a real poet he will not compromise his art, he will not consent under any circumstances to write

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verse unworthy of him. And so it is with the politician and the statesman. Mirabeau used to get money from the Royal Court; but though he used the money for himself, he used the Court along with the National Assembly to further his idea of establishing in France a constitutional monarchy of the English type, neither absolutist nor demagogical.

“But supposing he is a political genius, who, despite his passion for his calling, yields to his lower instincts and ruins his work?” On this point there is nothing to be said. Here dishonesty coincides with bad politics, with political incompetence; and incompetence will be incompetence whatever its motives, good or bad, and regardless of the form it may take as innate and fundamental, or as momentary and incidental. So the great poet, for a price or to do a favour, might consent to write uninspired verses of adulation or “of occasion.” In this case, however, he would no longer be a poet.

XXXIV

Disgust for Politics

POLITICS and filth are so frequently identified in the ordinary conversation of people that the thoughtful person is rather puzzled by the situation. Why should politics, one of the fundamental activities of man, one of the perpetual forms of the human spirit, alone enjoy the homage of such contemptuous language? We never describe other forms of activity as essentially filth. We do not habitually think of scientific, or artistic, or social or moral activity, in any such terms of repugnance.

We must first of all remember that the human being is by preference a lazy creature. All of us, even the hardest workers and the sturdiest and most determined fighters, have at least rapid and fleeting yearnings for peace, tranquillity, repose. In the mass of the race this longing constitutes the prevailing state of mind. Only a few people, and they too only for a few moments at a time, are really recon-

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ciled to the truth: that there is no rest for man on this earth except rest in struggle and through struggle; that there is no peace except in war and through war. Hence the continuous negation of politics which this longing implies. For politics offer the greatest and most conspicuous display of human combative-ness; and in place of politics we are ready to take anything however meaningless so long as it makes verbal denial of struggle and pays verbal homage to the ideal of inertia: "so-
cial justice," "international justice," "equal-
ity," "fraternity," "co-operation of classes,"
"leagues of nations." And what is political
action? Factional and party strife, govern-
ment by factions and parties, law-making
which represents prosperity for one group and
disaster for other groups, diplomatic jockeying
and fencing, commercial compromises, tariff
wars—wars of armies and navies! Contradic-
tion, at every point, of the ideal of peace and
tranquillity, of the aspiration to repose and
inertia!

But this is not enough, as yet, to account
for such a filthy epithet. We must add, there-
fore, one other point: that politicians and

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statesmen are of course unable to effect rapid changes in the feelings of their publics; so they accept those feelings as they find them, humouring them in words and thwarting them in deeds, covering their tracks with sophistries, diversions, and oratorical buncombe of various kinds. They cannot, however, cover their tracks always, nor from everybody. Their lies and deceits are detected; and since nothing else in particular can be done about it, we console ourselves by muttering a word of scorn.

And there is something more curious still! Politicians hardly ever possess the higher faculty of dialectic—of synthesising and harmonising contraries—which is the peculiar province of the philosopher. To a greater or lesser extent they share in the feelings of their publics, though their political scent leads them to frustrate these popular aspirations every hour of the day and every day of the week. In these circumstances they feel as though they were being forced to do wrong against their will: they have to lie when they would far rather tell the truth—they have to declare war, when they would far rather make peace. So they are tormented with a feeling (a mis-

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taken one, it may be added) that they are living an unnatural and an immoral life. And they too angrily hiss through their teeth an epithet that was first used against themselves. They too say that politics is filth; and they look forward to a time when they will be permitted to retire *procul negotiis* to cultivate cabbages in a garden (when they are well advised), or to dabble in literature, arts, and sciences (when they are not so well advised).

Is there any escape from this contradiction between political words and political deeds? Is there a way to soothe the conscience of the statesman and to sweeten the bad temper of the citizen? There is, in theory, though the measure is hardly a practicable one: statesmen might learn to think philosophically, and the public might cease to be an unthinking mob. This would not do away with struggle, nor would it make combat any less bitter and intense. But it would produce something of which mediæval chivalry furnished a tiny and partial example: struggle with the realisation of its necessity, with consideration for adversaries, and with good faith in trickery, since trickery would still have to be regarded as a

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legitimate measure of warfare in politics. Or, leaving chivalry aside, we could introduce into politics something of the spirit and manner of thinking that prevails in a field not far removed from politics: in economic life—in commerce and industry. There everybody knows that *les affaires sont les affaires*, that business is business; and that a competitor who tries to run his business on a basis of morality and justice, will certainly do nothing moral or just, and quite as certainly will ruin his enterprises and do harm to himself and society.

I say there is no hope of any change, at least for the present. And I am thinking of the fate of Machiavelli. In a devotedly religious spirit (only in such a spirit can new and unwelcome truths be discovered and proclaimed) Machiavelli divined and formulated the true theory of the nature of politics. But among all the great men who have obtained, as they could not fail to obtain, a glory proportionate to the grandeur of their intellects, he is the only one to be accorded a glory darkened under a cloud: his name has given rise to a common noun which is taken as a synonym for perfidy and wickedness.

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And in recent history we find the example of a people which, through the mouths of its statesmen, set out to lay bare its *arcana imperii* and to make political action transparent and self-conscious. And with what result? With the result that it was overwhelmed by the horrified condemnation of the entire world and met utter disaster in the war it had undertaken. The Germans made a great mistake, but it was a mistake of political method not of political theory. It was a mistake that demonstrated their possession of stronger and clearer theory than that of other peoples, and their superior intellectual courage as well. But it showed them lacking in political instinct, which teaches that secrets should be kept secret, and that those who ask to be cajoled and fooled should be fooled and cajoled. The world was not ripe for the intellectual sincerity of Germany.

In view of this, we cannot withhold our approval of the statesmen who led the nations on the other side. They, as an Englishman said of the English, knew from long education how to keep their true purposes hidden even from themselves. Or, as a Frenchman said of the

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French, they knew how to adorn their policies with the no longer fragrant flowers of generosity, humanity, and international justice. The end proves that doing as they did they did exceedingly well. To them belongs the applause of statesmen, while the other nation must rest content with the sympathy of philosophers. A sympathy, be it understood, which is extended not to German policies, which were unwise, but to the philosophy which the Germans allowed, inopportunely we must admit, to enter their policies.

XXXV

The Cravenness of States

IF, after the foregoing, some one should need still further convincing that political struggles are not ethical struggles and that States fight one another not as ethical but as economic individualities, we might submit to his consideration facts easily observable in history but which I prefer to choose from the living present or from a past so recent as still to linger quivering in our memories.

An individual, to be moral, must maintain what we call his "dignity"; and individuals, in fact, do maintain their dignity with the most fastidious care; for they know that it is proof of their seriousness as individuals and at the same time something they owe to the moral ideal they cherish in their bosoms. So a man, who is half a man, will not yield to wrongful threats; nor will he persist in a line of conduct after its error or injustice has been brought home to him. Willingness to admit

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mistakes is, in fact, a test of individual character, and in such admissions a man not only does not abase, but actually ennobles himself: he who humbleth himself shall be exalted, says *Holy Writ*.

But States have quite another concept of dignity: it is a dignity which consists in asserting power with no other limit than the extent of that power and the opportuneness of the times, places, and manners, of asserting it.

Under no circumstances will a State confess itself in error. Why should it? It can see no reason for doing so. At the most it will admit mistakes of judgment, but privately and at home. On the other hand a State will buckle before threats when the threats are really dangerous. As is said bombastically: States recognise no master “save God and the conqueror’s sword.”

The dignity of States has a counterpart in the dignity of the bully, who will yield only to a bully stronger or luckier than he. But there is an important difference even here. The bully is a man with some enlightenment even though a distorted one: he has a conscience, and a certain sense of honour. Some-

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times he may prefer death or ruin to submission, and so render homage indirectly to the moral consciousness—destroying himself *ad majorem gloriam* of human dignity.

But States cannot do even that much. They cannot choose ruin or death in preference to salvation with dishonour. So as far as this is concerned they would be called cowards, if they were individuals of moral responsibility. They evade this epithet for the simple reason that they have no status in the realm of ethics; and their acts of baseness are not acts of baseness but “painful renunciations” which all States, from time to time as the wind of history blows, have made, are making, and will make again.

Base and cowardly likewise (if the words were at all applicable to States, which they are not, except metaphorically), the procedures of States in their dealings with other States: sharp commands and the big stick for the weak or the weaker; respectfulness and politeness for Powers of equal power; cringing, flattery, and boot-licking for the stronger! Show me a State which, in the war just over, maintained its dignity in the ethical sense of the

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word! We had the spectacle of France, a trembling mendicant for aid from any one in a position to lend it; the glad hand of fellowship extended to savages and barbarians; Senegalese and Indian *gurkas* galloping about the "fair land of France"; words of feminine allurement for peoples she had, in better times, insulted and despised; invitations (vain ones) sent to far Nippon for yellow troops to defend her invaded territory; unctuous democratic manners, and pious ejaculations on "Latin sisterhood," for neighbouring countries of Latin origin; consecrations to liberty, human justice, and democracy, for a republic farther removed! . . . Who could enumerate the full list of such acts of fawning that in an individual similarly placed would have been regarded as morally disgusting? But, the war won and over, it is a different story. France "wraps herself in her dignity." She now steps forward as the high administratrix of justice—*Monsieur de Paris*, one might almost say—toward the great people that is her neighbour. Forgetful of common bonds of humanity, insolent, sarcastic, cynical, she now applies the high-sounding maxims of liberty and justice

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to the advantage of her exclusive interests; with an occasional descent from the high horse, even now, however, as it proves convenient to conciliate one or another of the greater powers.

At the culminating point of German fortunes, at the critical moment of the war, we had the spectacle of England and the United States—not vanquished but deeply shaken—condescending to advances which were offers of compromise and peace. And these advances? They were insolently repelled by the momentary victor, the proud German State, which a short time afterwards was making advances on its own account (and what craven ones!), finally accepting, meek as a lamb, everything that was written for it on a piece of paper! An ancient Roman adage reminded conquered peoples that the only hope they had was to hope for the worst—*nullam sperare salutem*. But this recourse is adopted by States only when no other hope is left (the case of Saguntum and Numantia). As long as there is a ray of hope, States never risk heroic gestures and desperate casts of the dice: they think, and they are prudent. And why should they not be? States are magnificent an-

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imals, mighty, colossal; but their chief desire is to endure, and to escape destruction they will resort to any device that is available. "For the moment," they seem to say to themselves, "for the moment we save our skins. The future will look after itself."

This is the bald truth. And there is nothing more factitious than the bragging of victorious States after wars are over—as though they had saved their honour and the vanquished had lost theirs! As a matter of fact, there was no honour to be saved and there was no honour to be lost. It was just a case of vital interests to be conserved in the best manner possible. If the bragging came from individuals, it would be sickening, nauseous. It is not so in the case of States for the reason given; and because, in a practical way, all the pompousness in question helps to rouse certain forces essential to national existence.

States therefore are not heroic, though their citizens may be—the men and women, the publics, which serve them and in the very act of obedience and devotion rise above them to far higher than political planes. As forms necessary to the progression of history, States

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are similar to the so-called “forces of nature” (really “forces of nature” are like States), which the individual utilises and controls but does not create. In so utilising and controlling them, he spends treasures of intelligence and will, thereby demonstrating, in his very servitude, his superiority over them. A philosopher once said that the eye of the peasant girl looking at the Sun is infinitely more precious than the Sun itself. The remark implies no censure of the Sun. So the clarifications I have just made imply no censure of States: States do just what they ought to do and just what they have to do. The above are clarifications; because their aim is to make things clearer—to afford an unprejudiced view of reality. And to see things as they are is not only an intellectual obligation: it is a moral duty.

XXXVI

The State as an Ethical Institution

It might be observed that in what we have just been saying two different concepts of the State alternately appear: the concept of the Ethical State, and the concept of a purely political and non-moral State. The two definitions have been used in this way deliberately, without any reserve or hesitation, because both are true.

A principle not sufficiently appreciated, but which should be introduced as a fundamental of method into modern thinking and established and diffused therein, is that to understand a philosophical proposition the latter should be carried back to its historical origin and interpreted in the light of the situation that provoked it. Of every doctrine we should ask: against whom, or against what, was it first put forward? As the point has otherwise been stated: the true significance of a philosophical assertion may be determined by the

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polemical tendency expressed or implicit in it. Studied in any other way, it has no meaning or—what amounts to the same thing—it has a meaning that is vague and elusive, and hence gives rise to arbitrary or capricious interpretations.

The proposition here confronting us may be thus formulated: “The State knows no law except its own power.” Now applying the principle laid down above, we must recognise that this theory of the State was advanced at various times and on various occasions: by the age of the Renaissance—to keep to the most celebrated instances—which was engaged in conflict with political theories surviving from the Middle Ages; three centuries later, by Romanticism and the Restoration, in conflict with the political theories of rationalists and Jacobins; in our own day, finally, by Nationalism and Imperialism in conflict with old-fashioned humanitarian ideas—“ideas of ‘89” (though this last debate is probably nothing more than the tail-end of the preceding). In circumstances where many people were thinking of the State as a moral and religious institution, subject therefore to the norms of Christian

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piety, it was salutary to shout loud enough for every one to hear that "States are not run by prayer-books"; that they do, indeed, require virtues, but not Christian virtues: political virtues rather.

This was the truth discovered by Machiavelli, and it remains as a permanent conquest of the human race. It is an eternal truth, the soundness of which must be reasserted whenever we are confronted by intellectual positions similar to those it originally combated. Similar, in fact, if not identical, was the position of the rationalists, encyclopedists and Jacobins of Revolutionary times—a composite moralism that subordinated the State if not to the Christian, at least to the humanitarian, virtues of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. And against this idea prevailed the varied negation of conservatives and reactionaries from Galani to Heller, and of historico-philosophers from Hegel to Marx who taxed the new democratic ideals with hypocrisy and vacuousness, reasserting that the State is authority, and politics a struggle of forces (forces of nations or of classes, as the case may be). And this too was a permanent conquest for humanity. It

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too is an eternal truth, which in our times is being repeated by the offspring of those thinkers, similarly varying in tendency as reactionaries or revolutionaries, as nationalists or communists—by Treitschke, by Maurras, by Lenin.

But the other proposition is also true and just as true: that “the State is a moral value,” that “the State is an ethical institution.” And this truth likewise becomes apparent if we recall the circumstances in which such formulæ were enunciated or repeated. Without going too far afield, we may briefly mention the great conflict between Church and State, between Reformation and Counter-reformation, between laic society and theocratic society, between the immanentist unitarian conception of government and the transcendental dualistic conception of government. People were assigning to the State the care of the bodies of its citizens, and to the Church the care of souls; to the State material power and the “secular arm,” and to the Church the surveillance of morality and education. Worse yet, the State was sometimes considered as a brute power, sinful and even wicked, which the Church was

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to restrain, educate, redeem! To all such it was important to reply that the State is the true Church, that it has souls and not only bodies in its keeping, that it exercises on its own account the prerogatives of morality and education, which it delegates to no one and with which it is invested by no one. It is not surprising that this ethical conception of the State should stand out most strikingly in that one of the modern philosophies which first tried seriously to bridge the hiatus between heaven and earth and to express transcendent values in terms of immanence. From the philosophy of Hegel, the notion made its way into science, and into the political journalism of Germany and other countries.

So then the State may support two different and even contrary definitions, both of which will be true? The State is purely political—pure force, power, utility, devoid of moral character? And at the same time the State is an ethical institution—the State is morality?

Obviously these two conflicting definitions, predicated one after the other, are not think-

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able in connection with each other unless we think dialectically—unless, that is, we keep them concurrent side by side in their parallel duality but combine them in a spiritual process whereby the State is taken, in a first phase, as pure potency, pure utility; and thence rises to morality—not repudiating its former character but negating it, preserving it by transcending it. If we do not think dialectically (which means philosophically), we always have those two contrary definitions on our hands; and we can do nothing but repeat one after the other, in reciprocal contradiction, or vainly try to suppress now one and now the other, only to find them persistently and forever bounding up again, the one from the other, the other from the one. Unless we think philosophically and dialectically, we shall fail, however hard we try, in completely reconciling them. We may prove this from the case of Treitschke. This German writer owes his fame to his theory of the Power-State—and such his theory is, unquestionably. And yet we could demonstrate just as well that Treitschke held the theory of the Morality-

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State. Treitschke was not deeply and thoroughly trained in philosophical niceties; so he is continually modifying and contradicting the first theory with the second without ever finding a harmonious synthesis to unite them.

For that matter, as we become more expert in dealing with the problems of practical philosophy and with the history of ethics, we discover that the problem of the State cannot be considered as a special problem of ethics standing all by itself. It is all very well to speak of a State, and to speak of it metaphorically as an entity. But at bottom the State is nothing but man in the practical phase of his activity. Outside man practically operative the State has no reality whatever. Now the great antithesis which has agitated ethical research throughout the history of ethics is the antithesis between utilitarian action and moral action. As is well known, thinkers tried to get out of the dilemma by reducing the second to the first—utilitarianism; and then by reducing the first to the second—abstract absolutism. Finally they discovered that neither the one term nor the other could be eliminated, but that both

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had to be dialectically combined. The opposing conceptions of an egoistic State and a moral, humanitarian State correspond exactly to the two opposing unilaterals represented by utilitarianism and abstract absolutism. With these in fact they are respectively identical.

XXXVII

Rational and Irrational Institutions

WHAT used to be called “illuminism” in the Latin countries and is usually called “rationalism” elsewhere, was an effort to substitute for alleged “irrational” institutions institutions idealised as “rational.” But this attitude toward public affairs has been pretty well demolished by political journalism in the period between the end of the eighteenth century and our own time; and its fallacies are now generally taken account of in many phrases of common currency, if not in the ideas commonly prevalent on political and social matters. However, the dogmas of rationalism are forever getting to their feet again, undermining existing institutions, sapping the foundations of our faith in them. And there is no simple formula for disposing of its doctrines. We always feel that there is an element of truth in what the rationalists say. So it is always

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necessary to reclarify our minds as to the logical principle underlying rationalism, and remind ourselves of just what it is that rationalism denies, of the real controversy it gives rise to, of the refutation, finally, that may be made of it.

Taken by and large, the rationalistic method simmers down to an analysis and an argument which shows that one existing institution or another conserves the interests of individuals, groups of individuals, or classes; that it is a selfish institution therefore, and is not based on universal interests, or, as the phrase goes, on Reason. In the course of history the terminology of rationalism (or "illuminism") has varied from pole to pole, though its doctrines have remained consistent. In the old days the institutions which it criticised were called "unnatural," contrary to Reason, that is; while those of which it approved were called "natural." Later on it called the former "natural" because "irrational," and the latter "human" or "civilised" or "rational."

In fact, if we examine institutions from a certain point of view (and not this or that institution merely, but the whole list of them)

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we can always find some private interest which they favour. And this applies not only to strictly political institutions, but even to those more general ones that would seem to be indispensable to any society. The family, for instance, may be referred to the physiological instincts of the individual. It may be thought of as a device for protecting women and children; or as an instrument for control and transmission of property and power. So true is this that more extreme and less prudent reformers have thought of destroying this "fester burg" of selfishness, the prop and underpinning of all other selfish interests, substituting society for the family, separating children from their parents, weakening the very institution of matrimony by divorce.

But the error of the critics and publicists of the illuministic school lies in their mistaking private interest, individual interest, "interest," in short, for selfishness; whereas selfishness is not individual interest, but the assertion of individual interest against the public, the universal, interest. Taken by itself, individual interest is not only not in conflict with universal interests but is the essential pre-

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requisite of the latter, and the latter's most effective instrument.

What is more privately, more individually interested, what is more "natural," more indifferent to the public welfare, than a child sucking at its mother's breast? The baby is exclusively concerned with getting his food and growing. He has not another thought in the world. But it is evident that if he did not do just what he does society would never find its soldiers, its apostles, its workers. Life first, philosophy afterwards! First being, then moral being! What is more lovable than children? And could we love them, if all their "private interest," all their concentration on themselves, were a reprehensible selfishness?

The fact is, that the advantages and the satisfactions the individual derives from certain institutions do not prevent him from working for the public interest, but rather require him to work for it. Good parents love their children as living parts of themselves; but they do not exploit them on that account. They strive rather to make free and happy citizens out of them. So it is with every institution. It conserves individual interests, but it looks

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at the same time to objectives beyond the individual and these it attains effectively. This is the "rationality" of institutions, and the only real and concrete rationality that exists or can be thought of. Rationalists may try to devise a society which will be wholly free from individual interests and based on purely universal interests, wholly responsive, that is, to the laws of reason. But they cannot conceive of such a society even as an idea. The rationalistic mind is really an empty mind. A better name for rationalism would be "abstractionism."

And yet, why is it that the rationalists have exerted such a great influence in the past, and still continue to exert such a great one, even in our own time? Not because of their vacuous theory, certainly (vacuity means impotence); but because of something real and true that lies concealed among their fallacies! What this something is we may readily see. Institutions develop in the course of history and they decay in the course of history—what the Lord giveth the Lord taketh away! Institutions come gradually into conflict with the public interest; the selfish element in them

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grows and grows till it prevails; and this prevalence is their condemnation and in the end their death. The problem, however, is not to make the world over on principles of pure abstraction, but continually and forever to reform or replace institutions where private and public interests have ceased to be identical. The public interest is forever seeking new representatives and new vehicles. So theocracy rose and fell; so feudalism rose and fell; so have risen and fallen many of the organisms created by what is called capitalistic society. So will others come and go.

The person therefore who has some reverence for the truth will never dare to proclaim himself, unilaterally or absolutely, a conservative; nor absolutely or unilaterally a reformer and revolutionary. He will say that he is both at the same time. Such a statement will seem complex and difficult, but only because life is complex and difficult. At all times and on all occasions will he combat that abstract and fallacious, that arid and destructive, rationalising which is forever analysing institutions to discover, and to curse, the private in-

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terests—"the interests"—they are found to favour. Individuals try to live and to live the best life possible. Some people seem bent on tearing off all the veils of poetry that beautify this effort, on profaning all the sacredness, on affrighting all the *religio*, that stands guard over it. But this manner of conceiving reality puts reality to death; it assails, not as it supposes, such institutions as are irrational, but all institutions in their very idea. And what it offers in exchange is as stupid as a proposal that human beings should cease loving, or love according to rules laid down by abstract reason in advance. Every institution, whether newly created or reformed, must, in order to endure, become a private interest of individuals—it must become sentiment, affection, memory, hope, myth, idol, poetry. In the eyes of the rationalist this process will seem to be a process of contamination; but in reality it will be a progressive rejection of abstraction in favour of life. To be sure, this actualising, this concreticising, this realisation, involves the risk that what is moral will become selfish, that what is useful will some day outlive its use-

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fulness. But is not this the fate of all human things?

This institution, or that institution, will pass away some day. But meanwhile it will have lived!

XXXVIII

Social Programmes and Practical Reality

EVERY so often we are called upon to decide just what political or social or ethical “platform” is the one that comes closest to the truth and to the public need and which, accordingly, is entitled to our confidence and our support. And these are moments of anguish for us. No matter how persuasive a given programme may seem, we are filled with a fear, which gradually becomes a conviction, that in the end its triumph and application will do more harm than good.

“Free Trade,” we may say. “Hands off! Give us a chance to breathe! Let’s turn the individual loose for a time, build up business and concentrate economic power!” But, are we not likely, in the mad race that results, to lose sight of other noble and very important needs—peace, for instance, modest, frugal

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living, the time and the quiet necessary for the inner life?

So then, a check on the individual, stability rather than flux; State Socialism, or unionism, or communism! But are we not likely, in this case, to cramp or stifle individual initiative, to weaken the combative instincts of competition and struggle? These alone are the forces that save us from degeneracy and make men of us. They alone are the forces that give meaning and value to life. They alone lead to the creation of higher and higher forms of life, composing through the centuries the epic of humanity, sung with incessant fervour and with increasing inspiration by generation after generation of bards and men.

Careful, therefore! Conservatism! Respect for the past, the sacred past that binds us to the traditions of the forefathers! But are we not in danger then of keeping artificially alive something that is really dead—of cultivating empty forms?

So—progressivism and radicalism! Let us be rid of the dead past! Let us fight for rationality, regularity, equality, justice! But in the new, modern and freshly painted house we

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try to build in this way, are we going to feel as much at home as we did before? Shall we not miss the sheltered corner by the old fireplace, so cosy and so rich in memories? Will not things seem lifeless and barren and without purpose?

And here is a programme for increasing the population! Heavens! Haven't we enough unemployed as it is? And if we add to our poverty, shall we not fall prey to wealthier and better constituted nations? No, we must have birth control! And see our armies crippled in times of war?

To tell the truth, if some Divinity could give us full power to execute any one of such programmes as seem to us likely, over a long or a short period of time, to serve the best interests of humanity, we would hesitate to accept the responsibility. We would perceive all the dangers involved in the very things we held desirable, and we would end by handing back to God a power that it is His place, rather than ours, to exercise. And indeed it is His task and not ours: that is to say, it is the task of History which brings things to pass, as it has always brought things to pass, not

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through the efforts of separate individuals, setting out to do these or those particular things, but as a resultant of the combined and conflicting and clashing efforts of all individuals.

What, then, are we to do as citizens, as men? Just what we actually do, just what all men who are really practical and efficient do. Men of achievement do not set programmes for history after the manner of theorists (or rather of bad theorists and incompetent executives). They do have in their heads something resembling a rational programme, in which, more or less ingenuously, they profess belief. But when it comes to action (political action, especially), they are just themselves: they obey themselves, they express themselves, they *realise* themselves. But this Self that each expresses—is it an arbitrary creation, or an arbitrary choice, of his own? Is it not a necessity of the Spirit—of the actual situation in history in which we each find ourselves? And is this necessity not attested by one of our deeper instincts, by the voice of conscience? Some people feel that they are “called” or destined to certain functions in society: they are born conservatives, or revolu-

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tionaries, or Free Traders, or protectionists; just as some are born savers and others are born spendthrifts, or as some are born fanatics, while others are born to tolerance—traits which—also according to circumstances—vary with ups and downs. It often happens, doubtless, that each of us gives an absolute value to the “platforms” he professes and to the policies he approves. But such illusions—they are useful within certain limits—would soon be exploded if we put them to the test suggested above, assuming that absolute power for applying them were given us by a God. For we should at once become aware that the work we strive to do is explained and justified by the differing and conflicting work that others are doing and amid which and against which our own work is done. In fact, if everybody began to do what we are doing, our work would either cease or else swing over to an opposite character.

Misfortunes and sorrows have a value for us because they educate. But they come upon us of their own accord and despite our precautions. We should be mad indeed to go looking for them or to advise others to go

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looking for them. What we should recommend instead (because it has a bearing upon the active attitude toward life) is service of the Lord in joyfulness of heart; and joy is found in action in accord with our being—a doing that is the real exercise of our freedom. Platforms and programmes, taken as substitutes for individual initiative and originality, are harmful in two ways. In the first place, they fail, as has been suggested, to win our full confidence. In the second place, if they are at times poetic duplicates of our personalities, if they seem to strengthen us in our day's work, they stand at other times, when taken literally and objectively, in opposition to our temperaments and personalities, and impel us to futile outreachings toward unattainable goals.

Is it necessary to add as a caution that the personality we are to express is our moral personality? That the individuality in question here is the individuality of the specific situation in history and of the specific mission that devolves upon each of us from that situation? That selfishness and egotism, which halo themselves in a deranged and befuddled worship of

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self, are nothing but decadent perversions or natural exaggerations of a legitimate revolt against abstract ideals? And I recommended joyful service of the Lord, rather than joyful service of the Devil, because the Devil has never been famous as a source of joy. *Sei du!* *Sei du!* “Be thyself—thyself!” writes a modern German poet named Dehmel, in the refrain of one of his poems addressed to his own son. But the word “you” has a twofold meaning—like the word “I,” of which, in this case, it is a synonym.

XXXIX

“Intellectuality” and “Intellectuals”

As a result of well-known developments in social and political life, there is, in Europe at least, more discussion to-day than there used to be of “intellectuality,” so-called, of its “rights,” and of the importance of “safeguarding” those “rights.” Even “unions” or “leagues of intellectuals” have been proposed.

But all such cautions and precautions, all such vigilance and protection, seem to me to play into the hands of the opposition; for they tend to represent “intellectuality” as a sort of superfluity, a sort of luxury, calculated to make life more pleasant and to lose which would be as melancholy as the loss of our pretty women from the face of the earth, with all their arts and charms—their evening gowns especially. No wonder that, in opposition to such an attitude, there arise a contempt for “intellectuals” and their “literature” and—leagues

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for leagues, unions for unions—leagues of people who are determined to better their station in life and to have their voice in the direction of affairs; and who can point to needs more fundamental and more urgent than “literature.”

To put the discussion on a broader and more satisfactory footing, it is interesting to note that the gentlemen of the opposition (extreme democrats and leaders of the proletariat) nevertheless make, in their attack on “intellectuality,” an exception in favour of one form of intellectual activity: the positive sciences. They even demand the development and wider diffusion of knowledge in the fields of physics, of chemistry, of mechanics, of physiology, and in general of all the branches of learning “useful for living.” And another exception they make in favour of certain artistic products seemingly essential to public hygiene and to the entertainment and instruction of large numbers of people: the theatre, the “movies,” and dancing. Whereupon another interesting fact should be observed: that in this latter exception or demand, democrats and socialists are sharing and propounding an idea

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belonging to the bourgeoisie, to the “fattest and crassest” bourgeoisie (to use a traditional Latin phrase); for our shop-keeping classes, looking down disdainfully upon philosophers and “literary fellows,” also demand, on the one hand, objects “useful for living,” and on the other spectacles pleasing to not very deep-gazing eyes; and they applaud and remunerate, on the one hand, inventors of machines and patent medicines, and on the other vaudeville actors and ballet girls.

From all this, it becomes apparent that the aversion to “intellectuality” has nothing particularly political or sociological about it, and does not spring from any emotions peculiar to the class struggle. It is nothing but the ancient, the recent, the perpetual conflict between the (cheap and unilateral) practical and the theoretical, between the (insistent and insurgent) body and the mind. It is, indeed, the time-honoured conflict between the parts and the whole. The ancient analogue of the Greeks and the Romans, which takes its name from Menenius Agrippa, is much more aptly applied to this conflict than to the competitions between plebs and patriciate which centuries

“Intellectuality” and “Intellectuals” ago gave rise to the fable of “the body and its members.”

What, after all, is this thing which is popularly called the “pursuit of truth and beauty,” or thought and imagination, or simply “brain work”; and is known to the schools as “philosophy” and “art”? It is the Spirit forever aspiring to the Eternal, forever grasping at the universe to penetrate and understand it. That materialistic, commonplace, prosaic men mistake this aspiration and this effort for idleness, amusement, luxury; that many people avail themselves of the pretext of such labours to obtain material advantages and to further their hunt for wealth or notoriety or worse, does not effect the character of that aspiration or the nature of that effort. Rather than “brain work” another more significant name might be given them: they might be called “religion” or the “religious spirit,” for thought and the creative fancy are the fountain-heads of all human faith.

And need we remind any one that this religion, this religious attitude, this aspiration to the Eternal, this life of thought and imagination, is the origin and the creator of all prac-

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tical life? That without it the “positive sciences,” the sciences which are most utilitarian in the Baconian sense, would lose all encouragement and sustenance? That these same sciences would languish, dry up, come to an end, becoming still more extrinsic and mechanical than they now are? Even social and political conflicts develop from premises of thought and from ideals evolved and pictured in the imagination. The very revolutionary classes themselves, now so noisily contemptuous of philosophy and literature, existed before they came into the world in the “mind of God,” in the mind, that is, of some philosopher or some poet. We need make no defence of something that need not be defended because it cannot be attacked. At the most, it is possible to insult this philosopher or that poet in their individual persons; but never Poetry and Philosophy. These rise, and develop, and do their work, indomitable and dominant through the ages, from an intrinsic and insuperable need of the human Spirit.

And that is why disputes as to the “part” that intellectuality should “play” in present-day society, or in some future utopian society,

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seem to me utterly devoid of sense. And at times I am inclined to suspect that the “intellectuals” who bestir themselves in defence of “intellectuality” may be as materialistic and as materialistically occupied as the people with whom they consent to quarrel.

XL

The Non-Philosopher

I DETEST the incompetent philosopher—the philosopher who is so presumptuous as to treat difficult problems as simple ones; and the philosopher who is a dilettante and an amateur and seeks amusement in the discussion of sacred things.

But I have a real affection for the non-philosopher, the man who stands unimpressed and indifferent before the thinker's distinctions and syllogisms and dialectics; the man who has the whole truth in a few simple fundamentals, expressed in limpid maxims, which serve as unfailing guides to his right thinking and his right doing—the man who has good sense, in other words, and who, moreover, is wise.

It is not that I admire him as an ideal of what a man ought to be. It is very clear to me that each of us has his peculiar work to do in this world. To the philosopher fall the doubts and the problems of humanity. His is

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the task of perfecting old ideas or of finding new ones. This is the vineyard where he must labour and gather his vintage of suffering and of joy. So I would not change places with the "man of common sense." For one thing, if the latter has none of the trials and troubles of the thinker, he has plenty of his own, as all mortal creatures have. Not even the plain man is truly happy!

Strange as the confession may sound, I love him rather as the child of the philosopher! What other children—to explain more fully—might the philosopher have? Pupils, perhaps? Followers? No, because pupils and followers never inherit the philosopher's thought, but just his phrases. Other philosophers? Philosophers who have minds of their own? These much less: for they, to turn a phrase of Carducci, "are sons of the laborious earth," born not of a parthenogenesis of philosophy, but of the new events and new needs of their own times, which they comprehend and interpret, establishing the connections of their thought not with the thought before them but with all the history of mankind before them—wider, vaster connections, that is. Or

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can it be that the philosopher is in some way congenitally deprived of the consolations of parenthood? Is he alone, among all men, predestined to sterility?

The “man of common sense” comes along just in time to rescue the philosopher from this humiliating predicament. For the “common sense” of the “man of common sense” is the heritage left by the philosophies preceding him, an inheritance continually increased by the capacity it has for absorbing the net products of new thought. Common sense is not a gift of nature, but a historical growth, a distillation of the thinking of the ages; and since it takes over the results of thought, and never the processes by which those results were obtained, it accepts them without subtleties and without reservations, without any of the paraphernalia of doctrine. Philosophy makes its way into the mind of the man of common sense as a simple statement of self-evident truths; and these are ready and eager at any moment to step forward as principles of practical action—as principles of reform in social and moral life, as principles of restoration or revolution in political life.

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The man of common sense is the son of the philosopher and the only offspring the philosopher cares to have.

So the poet's work is not intended to create other poets. New poets will come into the world, but in new times and under new conditions. And they too will be, not children of poets, but "sons of the earth," *enfants de la nature*. The poet will set other souls to vibrating with his words, souls that have not lived his hopes and fears and errors and redemptions. The latter can feel the beauty in the works he has created and derive therefrom an inspiration that will uplift their hearts and a vision that will bring them deeper and broader knowledge of the reality of things.

XLI

The Impenetrability of Consciousness

IT is a common lament that arguments end by leaving the disputants with the same opinions they had at the beginning; and since all the books that are written and printed are really arguments, conducted on a calmer, broader, and less personal scale, it has even been doubted whether books have much influence on the ideas and feelings of the people who read them. Whoever wishes to see the case for the uselessness of books brilliantly, skilfully, and forcefully presented can do nothing better than turn to the two poetic epistles which Goethe devotes with such elegant irony to that subject.

In reality, however, if one thinks of it, the very fact that so much breath is spent on arguments and so much sweat on the making of books would seem to prove that people do not find them wholly useless. It is hardly probable that the human being, so canny in so many ways, would waste so much labour to no

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purpose. It might seem more in point, therefore, to ask a different question. Is there not something wrong with that—shall I say mechanical or chemical?—conception of the human mind which sees the thought of one person making its way into another's thought, to tear the latter down, and then rebuild it, or to purify it or change it in other ways? This conception, at any rate, has no resemblance to the truth; but it is the notion that leads so many of us to accuse books and arguments of fruitlessness and fatuity.

Action of one mind on another in the manner here conceived does not occur between two debaters, or even between teacher and pupil, or governess and child—make the child as young and helpless as you please. For the pupil, as many writers have pointed out, is never a *tabula rasa*. No matter at what age you take him in hand, he is already somewhat formed, with ideas and inclinations of his own; or, to use terms more exact, he has problems of his own which are not the problems of the teacher; and the teacher in his turn can have no problems but his own, and the answers he gives are answers to his own problems only.

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The pupil accordingly takes from the teacher what he finds a use for, whatever, that is, corresponds to his own ideas and inclinations. All the rest he does not touch. To be sure, he may not refuse it altogether. If he is a faithful and obedient pupil he may memorise a great deal; but what he thus acquires he does not work into the substance, so to speak, of his intellect and character. His memory becomes a sort of temporary store-house. Of the little or much he leaves there a large part will go astray; but the remainder, in due time, he will find useful. As the years go by, the new problems of the pupil become increasingly similar to those which the teacher was answering long before. Words which had no meaning then now suddenly begin to say something—though now they are words of the pupil's own.

Shall we conclude that all the teaching has been wasted? It seems rather that we must say the opposite, that indeed it has been twice useful: the first time in nourishing the pupil's personality in a negative and in a positive way; the second time in giving him actual help. It will seem useless only to the person who has

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asked the pupil to become a duplicate of the teacher—who has looked, that is, for a supremely perfect inutility.

But going back to the question of discussion in general; why on earth should I accept the opinions—let us grant that they are sound ones—of my adversary or interlocutor? I have my problems and he has his; and our problems are not the same, even when we seem to be debating the same question. For each of us states the question in his own way. Each of us relates it to experiences of his own and connects it with meditations of his own. In reality, therefore, each of us is churning over a different problem. As we wrangle on, my opponent will think it very important that I should understand what he is saying; while I, to tell the truth, will be interested only in understanding myself a little better. It is only natural, accordingly, that I should leave the argument better satisfied with myself than I was before.

But he may happen to corner me, catch me short of arguments, throw me into confusion. In this case, he is not disturbing me in my problem; he has furnished me with the incen-

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tive to create other problems which for the first time are beginning to trouble me (hence my confusion); but these new problems, in any event, will be my problems and not his.

All that I have been saying of myself in relation to him applies just as well to him in relation to me. And that is only a fair exchange. We must assume, of course, that we are each arguing for truth's sake, and not, as often happens, out of vanity or some other passion, petty or serious as it may be—we must assume that we are each saying "things" and not just "words." On this hypothesis, I must recognise his rights, as he should mine. So true is this, that we can all remember unsatisfactory arguments where our opponents, after exchanging a thrust or two, have suddenly laid down their arms and agreed with us. In such cases we are left with a suspicion that an adversary so easily vanquished has not deeply grasped the matter in dispute. If he had, he would fight back. Even if he should come eventually to agree with us, if, that is, he should come to a problem so nearly like our own as to admit of a more or less similar solution, he could be expected to do this only after

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considerable time, after a period of solitary meditation and with the help of new experiences and new stimuli. What we said above of teaching applies to this situation also. It is not that the argument has been useless, or useful only in so far as it has compelled us to think more clearly on a certain subject and to formulate and state the questions it raises more accurately to ourselves. Its utility will be for the future, not for the present. It will help us in meeting problems still to come, not in solving those already solved. It serves, in other words, for our individual development, not for an impossible accord with other individuals, which assumes as possible a uniformity among all individuals that is certainly impossible.

Deeply tragic might seem the lot of those solitary thinkers who are not understood in their own times and live their lives finding no echo to their words save ridicule and mockery. And it is a hard alternative that seems to confront every man of a vigorous and original genius. To find companionship in his intellectual life, he must either restrain himself and mutilate his conception of things, or, to give

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free rein to his genius, resign himself to solitude, finding comfort in the hope of recognition from followers in a remote posterity. But, as we think of it, we must see that there is no real alternative, since only the second course is open to him anyway. In general it is true that the farther ahead a man goes, the higher he ascends, the fewer and fewer friends he finds to keep him company. This means that the problems more or less, or almost exactly like the problems he has, will appear for other people later on in history; and that only then will he find very numerous relations of consensus.

But in reality he is no worse off than the rest of us. We are all solitary creatures; for we are all “individuals”—and individuality implies diversity from others. All our mutual agreements are really disagreements, all our mutual understandings, really misunderstandings. So if sadness were to spring from that loneliness in this world which is represented by individuality of thought, the geniuses and the great would not be the only ones entitled to melancholy; that would be the privilege of every one of us, however modest and un-

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pretentious we may be. For the least of us has his own originality which cannot blend with the lives of others nor absorb those lives into itself.

But there is small consolation for this despondency in the thought that we are all in the same boat on the great ocean of Being, and that the best we can do is to seek out the truth each in his own isolated sphere, each aspiring to the good and attaining the good according to his own lights, conditions, and temperament. For our sadness is only deepened by this realisation of our reciprocal loneliness, of the mutual impenetrability of our minds. Here we are walking along beside one another, crowding one against another, interfering with one another, and yet utterly unknown to one another, perfect strangers to one another. Is there then no way to break the barriers down? Is there really no way to penetrate this impermeable impenetrability?

Of course there is, and we avail ourselves of it at every moment of our lives. We simply abandon the attitude of disputation, and adopt the attitude of listening and understanding; and then our adversary ceases to be an adver-

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sary—an enemy of our thought—and becomes himself the subject of our thought. Our problem ceases to be the problem we were discussing, but a new one: the problem of understanding him. To state the situation in technical terms, it is no longer a theoretical problem, but an historical problem; or, more exactly, it is no longer the one-sided history of ourselves, but the many-sided history of ourselves and of others—true history, that is, which should be the epilogue of every argument as it is the necessary preface.

History is the great peace-maker and the great consoler. To History the unknown great have always appealed, in the faith that History in its course would not only prove the truth of their conceptions, but award express and conscious recognition of themselves as authors. It is the historical attitude of mind that enables us to offer our hands to our opponents, now as to younger brothers who are dear to us, now as to fathers and grandfathers whom we have put in the wrong but still venerate, now as to children whose childish inexperience must be indulged. (All the more since they are looking at things with eyes that are fresh and

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unfatigued, and may hit on new truths by very
virtue of their inexperience!)

To be sure, not even these “historical” judgments we form ever bring us into perfect accord with any one. We never quite escape from our solitude. Indeed the better we understand people, the broader and richer we make our comprehension of others, the more successful we become in putting ourselves in their places—the less willing we are to accept many of them, the fewer and fewer do our real friends become, if any are left at all. And if we could comprehend everything, explain everything, put everything in its proper place, what should we be but God—God who knows everything and is known to no one? But this is impossible, and that is why God—an individual who is not an individual, an individual undifferentiated, unlimited, abstract—is an imaginary Being.

But this solitude, the solitude of the superior man, is not a melancholy thing. It is not even solitude in the sense of lonesomeness. For it is the very definition of what we call spiritual communion, the law of which is a greater and greater detachment from particular and indi-

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vidual things to attain better and better union with them in their universals. And it is tolerance also; not the tolerance of the coward who accepts whatever is laid upon his shoulders because he dare not throw it off; nor of the cynic who lets every opinion pass because he is indifferent to all opinions; but the tolerance which was named from the Latin *tolli*, and not only "bears," but "lifts" the barriers between mind and mind and makes them one by arranging them and binding them together in series of progression.

XLII

Beatitude and Yearning for Repose

IN just the same sense, historical contemplation is happiness, or “beatitude.” All of us have sometimes felt the deepest grief because of the misfortunes of ourselves, our country, or the world; or we have had moments of bitter remorse when we have utterly despised ourselves. And at such times we find comfort and peace again as we study all that has happened and consider objectively just how and why it happened (and—since it happened—had to happen). In so doing we place ourselves and our private trials and sorrows—and with ourselves, our family, our city, our country, the world—in a definite location and in a definite time in the whole chain of historical progression; and in the harmony that results in our own minds, we find the harmony of all things, the harmony of the universe.

But this contemplation, and the calm and

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joy it brings, is itself nothing but a phase of changing, developing, progressing reality. Our sorrows have suddenly shaken our faith in the rationality of life. Can such things be? We stop and look about us. We retrace our steps along the path we have just traversed. We understand, and we are happy again: our faith is restored.

However, if we enjoy the present, it is only because of what it is: a bond of connection between past and future, between the ground we have covered and the road that still lies before us. An epilogue, but also a preface—an epilogue of conflict and struggle, a preface to new struggle and new conflict! The rationality that has given us the sense of peace we feel compels us straightway to relinquish it; for in the harmony of the universe we become aware of our own place and function, what we are and what we ought to be. We are bidden to resume our work, our searching, our struggling, our travail, perhaps even to accept new sorrows, to fall into new error, experience new repentance, feel the pangs of new remorse.

To do otherwise, to try to perpetuate the “beatitude” enjoyed, to transform what is a

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respite from tumult into a demeanour of comfortable repose, to fix what is a mobile dialectic into a mode and manner of living, would be to evince the possession of scant moral and mental energy. The effort to make gods out of ourselves would result in our becoming something less than men.

It is true that an ability to withdraw from the impassioned scramble of the world (especially when such ability is a matter of discipline) is among the faculties that explain the special talents of the philosopher, the historian, the scientist, the man of essentially intellectual pursuits. Specialisations of this kind, with the scorn for "the strenuous life" which they imply, are wholly legitimate because they lead to socially valuable or socially necessary work. Besides, the repose thus earned is paid for in cash—with a corresponding sacrifice, I mean, of experience and the capacity for succeeding in practical spheres. But when the enjoyment of quiet and repose is exaggerated beyond the point where it is useful to society, it is and has always been properly condemned.

Exaggerations of this kind are not required by any rational necessity, and they betray ac-

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cordingly some defect in character—laziness, perhaps, or coldness, or selfishness, or love of ease. At times they reflect real cynicism and cruelty—as though the self-indulgent hermit looked out upon the world of busy industrious men and complacently enjoyed their nervous, restless struggling with their problems. It is this state of mind that the Italian language (among others) has chastised in giving far from respectful meanings to the word “philosopher”: a “taciturn,” “churlish,” “unsympathetic” man, and then again a “futile” or “harmless” individual. Certain chronicles of the early Middle Ages (the *Antapodosis* of Liutprand, for instance) relate that when kings or ministers were overthrown in those days, it was often the custom to shave their heads, put out their eyes, and send them to some monastery “to philosophise” (to live out their days, that is, far from the world in a contemplation that would disturb no one). “Stephen and Constantine,” says Liutprand, “laid a plot against their father; and without the knowledge of the public they removed him from the Royal Palace and sent him to a near-by island, *in qua cenobitarum multitudo*

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philosaphabatur; and having shaved his head, as the custom is, *ad philosophandum transmittunt.*"

But the true philosopher, the modern philosopher, would consider the old-fashioned "beatitude" of the monks disgraceful. His meditations are not ends in themselves. Even while adhering scrupulously to the field of his special competence, the true philosopher is ever returning from thought to life, with which he remains in contact and in sympathy; and from life he is ever returning to thought again, to fulfil his task—the upbuilding of the historical consciousness of his own society and his own time. Abuse of contemplative retirement from the world is not permitted him by the very nature of his thought.

If the exaggeration in question finds its real motives in a selfish longing for comfort and ease, it was also at one time supported by a philosophical idea, itself a mask for the same selfish motives: in fact, the idea I refer to was patterned on the familiar eudæmonistic vision of religious transcendence. Philosophy was regarded, in this connection, as knowledge of the Eternal, the Unchanging, the Immortal, a

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knowledge that brought true “redemption” to those who attained it. Continuing to live among other men, these fortunate beings had nevertheless found in the depths of their souls a hiding-place, a retreat, an asylum—a monastery, indeed—whither they could flee and where they could seek and find beatitude. It matters little that such philosophers often denied the existence of the other world with its paradise. They were simply replacing a rather crude mythology with a more refined one; for after all, this Eternal, Unchanging, Immortal something which they located in the heart of man was there as an abstraction and therefore as a myth, more or less corporealised and personified. Had it been conceived concretely, the Eternal would have appeared as identical with the Transitory, the Unchanging as one with the Changing, the Immortal as equivalent to the Mortal. So this place of refuge, this place of rest, this “World Beyond,” this “Spirit Absolute” (as the greatest of these philosophers, still shackled by theological preconceptions, called it) would have turned out to be a world and a Spirit as relative as all the rest. Not refuge and not rest, but dialectical

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synthesis and progression; not a monastery of ascetics, but an active, struggling society of men; not redemption from human toil, but a form of human effort.

And not “beatitude,” save in the limited sense we first described—a limitation that makes of “beatitude” an aspect of progression and thus deprives it of all advantage over action, movement, progression itself!

XLIII

The Religious Spirit

THE philosopher denies religion, but only in so far as religion is mythology. He does not deny religion as faith, as reverence, as the religious attitude of mind.

Even the most critical of philosophies must become a faith at each stage in its development; that is to say, it must continually assume certain bodies of fact to be true, to be established beyond discussion, and therefore to be valid as premises and foundations for conduct. When faith is so understood, the religious spirit is not intrinsically different from it; and the two terms might well be taken as synonymous and interchangeable were it not that the word "religion" is sometimes used to bolster up a defective form of faith where the "truths" that are repeated and "professed" as beyond discussion are lifeless and inert abstractions. (When this situation becomes apparent we are invited to remedy it by turning to a

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more "intimate," a more "spiritual" religion!) Whereas the truths which a real and legitimate faith embraces are essentially living truths, fruitful therefore of rich and intimately spiritual religion.

The faith or religion that blossoms and fructifies on the tree of philosophy is the consciousness a man comes to have of his oneness with the All, with true and complete and full Reality.

Many of us grow rebellious at the much that is cheap and petty in the life of the world, and we yearn for something vaguely denoted as "poetry," for something that will take us above and away from the empirical and the temporal, and allow us to soar in the Absolute and the Eternal. But one might ask: what poetry is conceivable apart from a truly religious consciousness? (Any other kind of poetry, in its fancied transcendence of the contingent and the temporal, reduces everything to the contingent and temporal, making the cheapness and the pettiness of life more intolerable still. Disappointed in its search, it is left impotent with empty hands.

Others of us again aspire to the superhuman.

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But if there is anything seriously thinkable in such an aspiration, what does it seek except the supremely human—not the superhuman, that is, but the super-individual, the truly ethical?

And others still would be heroic. But what is heroism, fundamentally—as it appears in its fully evolved idea, and not merely in some of its more spectacular and striking manifestations? Is it anything but a continuous and continual re-submission to the All, a surrender which the reverent soul is making at every moment, in the little things as in the big things, now with slight efforts, now with gigantic ones?

And religion, which thus proves to be poetry, and super-individuality, and heroism, is also harmony! Of true harmony we gather only a few secondary and illusory benefits when we seek it in the external forms of observances, of deportment, of words. We have real harmony only as we attain it at the sources whence it springs, only as we understand it as a unity of thought with feeling and action, and as a unity of feeling and action with thought. It comes to us only as everything that is thought in us becomes a principle of action (or at least

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modifies action to some extent); and as every-thing we do in our lives presents itself to us as a problem of thought. It comes to us only as, progressively, we become conscious of ourselves, know ourselves and the conditions under which we act, and as we act in conformity with our knowledge, acquiring a transparent self-consciousness of all we do, criticising it, passing judgment on it. All this and only this is harmony. This and only this can give us true reverence, true religion.

Since religion is harmony it is also aristocracy. The mob, the crowd, the *vulgaris*, properly so called, from which only the man of *prudentia* is to be excluded, is inharmonious: it thinks one thing and desires another, it desires one thing and does another. The mass of people is not only discordant and inharmonious with itself: it is wholly absorbed in its narrow and unilateral individuality. Prosaic, anti-heroic, it does not see true individuality in the Eternal; and it consoles itself for this blindness by ridiculing the Eternal, whether the latter blaze before its eyes in the words and deeds of the great, or tower on the horizons as a lofty and inaccessible mountain in the

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philosophies. Such derision, in all the gibes and sarcasms it has invented, may have the semblance of mental keenness and aristocracy. But it will be a false keenness and a false aristocracy, as readily detected as the vulgarity of the pumpkin, who cannot become a man of the world by putting on a top hat and fashionable clothes.

The age in which we are now living has been accused of destroying the religions in which human life had found its logic, its rules of conduct, its safe and sound stability. But the indictment cannot stand. In doing what it has done, our age has done something it could not help doing. In the process of dismantling religion as mythology, it was inevitable that many valuable pieces of the old structures would fall to the ground—precious thoughts and priceless virtues which had become attached to mythological dogmas. But these our time has made haste to gather up again; and it has worked them back, cleaned, repolished, restored, into a stronger, firmer, vaster, more noble edifice. It will be the glory of our generation if we shall succeed in founding a human religion, a pure faith, a pure religious

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spirit, born of thought, but of a thought embodying life and fertile of new life.

A human religion, I say, but not the “religion of humanity.” The latter was founded long ago by the super-national mythologies of universal redemption which succeeded the religions of races, tribes, peoples, or nations, and which—Christianity supreme among them—tried to be catholic or world-wide. The human religion I mean must be anti-mythological and free from all remnants of naturalism and utilitarianism. It must be pure religion, a religion which, placing God in the hearts of men, will be not only humanity’s religion but man’s religion.

At the present time we are witnessing the travail that presages the birth of such a religion; and in those painful throes we all are having our share. The old mythologies vigorously reassert themselves from time to time; and they provoke anew the negative, irreligious criticism which fulfilled so necessary a function in the past. Against the sterility and the violence and the prejudice of the mythologies rise the sterility, the violence, and the prejudice of the improvised anti-religions of a ra-

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tionalistic, intellectualistic, or utilitarian character. But in spite of everything, man will have his God again—the God that is worthy of man's new estate. For without religion, that is to say, without poetry, without heroism, without a consciousness of universality, without harmony, without the aristocratic spirit, no society can endure.

And human society is determined to endure. If for no other reason, for this reason: that it cannot perish!

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